THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING WITH TEACHERS IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

A Record of Study

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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August 2019

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the impact of instructional coaching on teachers of striving learners in the secondary English classroom. Conducted with eight teachers in a large urban high school, this study took place over four weeks and explored how implementation of Jim Knight's instructional coaching model affected teachers' comfort levels in working with striving learners (Knight, 2018). Additionally, the study focused on how instructional coaching influenced teachers' implementation of strategies specifically targeting striving learners. Teachers' overall experiences with coaching were also studied. Semi-structured interviews, annotated lesson plans, and the researcher's journal were analyzed using thematic coding methods. Results of the study suggest that instructional coaching has a positive impact on the comfort level of teachers when working with older striving learners. Furthermore, teachers indicated that their instruction benefitted when striving learners were emphasized in the instructional coaching cycle. The study highlighted the importance of a trusting relationship between teacher and coach based on equality and choice. An effective instructional coaching has the potential to improve teacher practice and student outcomes. This research explores the significance of the instructional coaching relationship and how that relationship impacts teachers and students.

DEDICATION

My deepest love and gratitude to my amazing husband and children. You are the greatest privilege of my life.

To the three generations of brave women who I have had the joy to follow in this work. No words could express my gratitude for my parents, who valued teachers above all and taught me the same fundamental truth.

Thank you to my beloved school district, incredibly talented and courageous teachers, and our brilliant students. I love learning from you.

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Attention to student literacy performance in the United States surfaced since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. NCLB represented a significant change for both schools and districts as it mandated one of the largest expansion of federal control in education in history (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006). Assessment, measurement, and accountability materialized as the forefront of education policy. Texas has a long history with high-stakes assessments, beginning with a high school exit exam requirement in 1987 and moving into a statewide accountability database in 1993 (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). NCLB escalated the already high-stakes state requirements in Texas schools to a federal level. Schools faced with high stakes exams and even higher stakes accountability measures for all students. Pressure for improvement remained constant as a significant change brought on by NCLB included monitoring student progress based on yearly assessments (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Although NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 under President Barack Obama, high stakes assessments and accountability remained central (Matthis & Trujillo, 2016). This has proven challenging to Texas students and schools as they continue to struggle with the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course exams (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Far beyond a statewide problem, students nationwide have not met expectations in English assessments. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report of 2015, only 37% of students nationwide in grades eight through twelve performed either at or above a proficient level in English, demonstrating no significant growth from previous years (Department of Education, 2015). Math scores have improved since the advent of NCLB, but reading scores remain stagnant (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Despite increased assessment and accountability measures, data shows that student performance in reading has remained stagnant.

Located in a large industrial city outside a major metropolis in southeast Texas, Southbelt High School enrolls over 4,000 students in grades nine through twelve yearly. It is the largest of the comprehensive high schools in South East Independent School District. Southbelt is also proud to be the most ethnically diverse high school in the school district with a 66% Hispanic, a 17% African American, 10% Asian, and a 6% White student population. In Southbelt, 58% of students classify as Economically Disadvantaged, which designates based on qualification for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. At Southbelt High School, 7.4% of students are qualified for, and are serviced through, the Special Education program (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Additionally, 6.7% of students classify as English Language Learners; the primary languages represented in the English Language Learner program are Spanish, Vietnamese, and Bengali (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Southbelt High School is at the center of a community rich in culture, diversity, and experience. Southbelt is proud to say that the school environment, our students, and teachers are full of personality and life, giving everyone a unique experience during their time at the school.

Define the Problem

A major aspect of secondary education in Texas is the importance of STAAR exams, including Algebra, English I, Biology, English II, and US History. The Texas Education Agency differentiates STAAR scores as *not meeting expectations*, *approaching expectations*, *meeting expectations*, or *mastering expectations*. For example, in the 2016-2017 school year for the English I exam, a raw score of 40-45 qualified as *approaching expectations*. A raw score

between 46 and 49 *met expectations* and 60-68 indicated that a student *mastered expectations* (Texas Education Agency, 2018). For the purposes of graduation, students are required to *approach standard*; therefore, *approaching standard* qualifies as a "pass" for English in South East ISD and at Southbelt because that is the only way students qualify for graduation with that designation. SEISD is committed to providing students with authentic and rigorous learning, but graduation remains a primary goal. Our curriculum and instruction focuses on providing access to high levels of learning. First, however, we must consider giving students the ability to move beyond high school and have the opportunity for continued education or entrance into the workforce. Without a high school diploma, students will potentially face serious economic, social, and/or health challenges in their futures (Muennig & Woolf, 2007). Biology, Algebra, and United States History have much higher rates of approaching and meeting expectation, so in the past two years, the district passing goal for those contents has shifted to *meeting expectation* as opposed to *approaching* (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

High school students enrolled in South East Independent School District have continually performed lower than the state average on the English I and English II State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) End of Course Exams. South East ISD scores below the state in STAAR English I and II with 56% of students approaching standard in English I and 59% approaching standard in English II upon initial testing in 2017. Southbelt High School performs above South East ISD as a whole, but it is still below the state with 64% approaching standard in English I and 67% approaching standard in English II in 2017 (Texas Education Agency, 2017). South East ISD began STAAR testing in the 2011-2012 school year, which was the beginning of standardized testing performance issues in the district's high school English classrooms.

Students who continue to struggle with state testing early in their high school courses face potential consequences for their future ability to graduate high school. *Approaching standard* at both the English I and II levels is a current requirement for graduation in Texas. Teachers in on-level English II, III, and IV classes work to meet the needs of a large numbers of re-testers, while still being responsible for the on-level English curriculum. Students have the opportunity to re-test three times per year: December, April, and July. Therefore, a senior student who has not approached expectation on both the English I and English II exams could potentially ended up testing 19 times between both tests by the end of high school. Testing and re-testing have become a central part of life at Southbelt as it is now a reality across the state. Both the campus and district have been exploring ways to help students overcome testing barriers.

The first year that success on the STAAR exam became a requirement for graduation was a turning point as South East ISD realized the large number of students in danger of not graduating based on STAAR status. Separate remediation courses were created for these students to help improve low test scores. Instead of a traditional on-level English III curriculum, students received test remediation throughout the year, which was based on English I and II curriculum. Students did not receive remediation in addition to on-level curriculum. Instead, the remediation course served as their upper-level English credit. If students had still not met expectation after their junior year, they enrolled in an English IV remediation class, which was also test preparation. Three of SEISD's high schools went a step further with these courses, placing re-testing sophomore students in a remediation class. Students enrolled in remedial courses were not showing gains on the STAAR exams as the years went on. Beyond issues with academic improvement, classes fully focused on remediation were often not a positive experience for students or teachers. Classes dissolved and students re-enrolled into on-level classes because of

the lack of improvement. Once remediation classes dissolved, on-level courses also changed. Teachers were still required to teach on-level curriculum and prepare students for college entrance exams and graduation, but they were now also responsible for STAAR intervention. For three years, on-level teachers did not have re-testing students in their classes, so many were neither comfortable with STAAR instruction nor intervention on this level. Most students had been in on-level courses to this point, so moving from an on-level English II course to an on-level English III course seemed a natural progression. For teachers, however, having re-testing students in on-level courses added a layer of complexity.

Beyond course modifications, the district also sought organizational changes to address new testing challenges. Immediately after the initial year of STAAR testing, South East ISD began taking steps to change the organizational structure in order to improve scoring outcomes. SEISD invested in English instructional coaches for every high school to help combat low-test scores and high levels of re-testing. The high school English exam splits between separate writing and reading exams during the first year of instructional coaching in South East ISD, 2012-2013, making comparisons to subsequent years difficult. In the 2014-2015 school year, reading and writing were combined with a score of 63% of South East ISD students passing the English I exam and 61% passing the English II exam (Texas Education Agency, 2017). District scores in English II made a gain in the 2015-2016 school year, which was the second year of instructional coaching in South East ISD. In that year, 64% of students in the district passed the English I exam with 68% passing the English II exam (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The next year, however, scoring changed to indicate *approaches*, *meets*, and *masters expectations*. With that structure, 55% of South East ISD students *met expectation* in English I and 58% *met expectation* in English II (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

SEISD has moved away from traditional professional development since the beginning of the instructional coaching program. The district offered monthly trainings that mostly focused on strategy implementation in previous years. Instead of relying on isolated trainings, SEISD planned to utilize instructional coaches to engage in continuous improvement cycles personalized to teachers' needs. Now, teachers are only required to participate in four district-wide professional development sessions per year, which focus on curriculum for the upcoming grading period and future assessments as opposed to instructional strategies in isolation. The district instructional coaches deliver these professional development trainings. SEISD hoped to create more meaningful professional development experiences by focusing on personalized coaching. This shift puts further emphasis on the role of instructional coaches in our district.

The Curriculum and Instruction department also hoped to assuage some of the significant testing challenges through the instructional coaching program, and SEISD intended for coaches to be working in English classrooms. The district introduced a logging system after the first year of instructional coaching with the hope of focusing the work. Logging requires them to input their activities for the day, categorizing first as either district or campus work, and then they must indicate whether the activities are directly related to their prescribed roles. The intention of logging time was to encourage people to spend more time in classrooms engaging directly with teachers. SEISD has a goal for coaches to be continuously working with teachers to improve student performance; however, schools have yet to realize intended over the last six years. Scores have not notably improved, leading to questions about how coaches are being utilized on campuses and what types of impact they have had on ELA teacher and student performance.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my research:

1. How does instructional coaching affect teachers' comfort levels in working with older re-testers?
2. How does targeted instructional coaching in intervention strategies change teacher practice with older re-testers?
3. How do teachers perceive their experience with instructional coaching throughout a coaching cycle?

Personal Context

As a fourth generation educator, I hold the highest respect for the craft of teaching. I saw both of my grandmothers, my great-grandmother, my mom, five aunts, and sister have a lasting impact on students' lives. There was never a doubt as to my professional path, and our family was thrilled for me to continue the legacy of teaching. Watching students from fifty years past come to pay respects at my grandmother's funeral was an incredible experience, and it spoke to an influence that I can only hope to have in my own career. My parents taught me that people remember the times they felt loved, and I could think of no better way to love than to teach.

After college, I began my career as an intermediate and high school English teacher in South East ISD. Throughout the triumphs and challenges of my career, I consider commitment to growth as the ultimate form of respect for the profession. This commitment facilitated an unexpected move out of the classroom. I have had the privilege of serving as an instructional coach and curriculum specialist for the past five years in SEISD. My first three years were spent at a brand new campus made up of approximately 900 students in grades nine through twelve.

This allowed me time and space to develop my own identity as an instructional coach. My past two years have been at Southbelt High School where I have worked with an English department made up of twenty-seven teachers. Although I came into the job as a "good" English teacher with no background or training in instructional coaching, I soon realized the power of relationships between the coach and teacher and how those relationships impacted teachers in the classroom.

I was obsessed with doing everything my way and on my own in the beginning of my journey as a new instructional coach. I jumped at every chance to teach a lesson or work with students because that was my comfort zone. At the time, I was on a small campus, so I tutored every STAAR English re-tester on campus. Also, I monitored them personally throughout their time at our school. Now I realize that it was my own form of control over the serious issue of re-testing; however, I was not helping to build teacher capacity. I would not have been able to verbalize it at the time, but I see now that I lacked the respect and trust for other people's work to let go of control. By taking control of other people's work, I was unintentionally putting myself above them. My biggest professional regret was leaving the classroom too early instead of continuing teaching. Leaving the classroom early caused me to struggle with coaching in the beginning. My first three years of coaching centered mostly around the classroom or in small groups teaching instead of engaging with teachers.

When I moved to Southbelt, a much bigger system of 4,000 students made giving every striving student my personal attention ineffective- if not impossible. The time came when I needed to turn to instructional coaching and engage with teachers as partners. At Southbelt, I also had the additional benefit of coming in as an experienced coach, so I was much more prepared to engage teachers in the process. Like the teachers at my previous campus, Southbelt

teachers are incredibly talented and diligent. They want what is best for students. Many of our teachers have spent their entire careers at Southbelt and several even graduated from Southbelt as students. They are deeply committed to our school and our community. The previous instructional coach at Southbelt, who came from a different campus in district, left before the school year was over because of conflicting personalities and vision. While teachers were open and welcoming to me, I knew that I must be very purposeful in my approach.

As a whole, Southbelt traditionally tends to be isolated from the rest of the district and has a reputation for questioning district initiatives and outside personnel. This changed my method to working with them. Gaining the trust of teachers and being a welcomed new member of the community was a top priority. After having a negative experience with their previous instructional coach, I knew that I would have to rely on building relationships in order to have an impact on student learning. Additionally, I came to understand that when emphasizing relationships, academic growth may not be seen immediately. Patience and flexibility would be key if I was going to connect with teachers in the long term. When I was brought over to Southbelt, he campus and district administration expressed their need for a high-capacity coach that could facilitate gains in scores but would not try to dominate the English department. Despite my initial concerns, teachers and administration met me with open arms. I have never experienced anything less than full support and care. I credit the opportunity to work at Southbelt for making me a coach- an imperfect one but still working to grow and become more effective.

Each teacher at Southbelt brings unique strengths to the classroom and attempting to control them or to fit them into my mold could be detrimental to both teachers and students. When moving to Southbelt, my entire mindset shifted to seeing myself as their equal partner. I could no longer rely on my comfort zone, which centered on micro-managing and taking control

of instruction. The teachers, administrators, and I want the best for students and are all faced with a large number of students who needed immediate and purposeful attention. My interest has therefore changed from "fixing" people to understanding how instructional coaches can best support teachers in their work with all learners. I have grown to understand that every teacher, student, and coach has endless potential for improvement, and that improvement will come by purposeful design. I continually come back to the question of what I can do as the instructional coach to facilitate the empowerment of teachers to continue growing in their own unique practice.

The coaching journey has led to my work with this research in understanding more about the impact of instructional coaching on teachers' experiences in the classroom, specifically with re-testing students, beyond the numeric data. In SEISD, teachers analyze data based on state, district, and campus assessments. Data analysis meetings are a regular part of Southbelt's monthly schedule. Because teachers have constant exposure to numerical data based on multiple assessments, I was more interested in the complexity of teachers' experiences in the classroom and their experiences with and impressions of instructional coaching. After years of facilitating data analysis meetings and tracking even the slightest changes, I began to see that there was more to the story of re-testing and how teachers engage with these striving students. I needed to change how I was thinking about my approach with teachers in order to dive into the coaching experience. Although students are always at the forefront of my mind, I have realized over my years coaching that teachers are the foundation of a school. Teachers remain from year to year and have the most impact on students. Of course student outcomes are central to our work, but I had lost perspective in understanding that teachers are the cornerstone of student learning, both

academic and beyond. With that in mind, I shifted my focus to teacher experiences as opposed to looking purely at student data.

The significant stakeholders in this research are the campus administration at Southbelt High School, the Southbelt English teachers, and the South East ISD Curriculum and Instruction department. My role as a specialist allows for 60% of my time to be allotted to Southbelt. This includes facilitating planning meetings, working with teachers in their classrooms, participating in administrative meetings, and planning testing and intervention programs for Southbelt. The other 40% of my time belongs to the department of Curriculum and Instruction. My district responsibilities include curriculum development, providing large-scale district wide professional development for teachers, and writing district wide assessments. Currently, I am the curriculum lead for English I, which includes developing English I curriculum, training English I teachers districtwide, and generating district assessments based on English I standards. In addition, every Friday is a designated district day, so I spend those days with my colleagues from other campuses working on district level projects.

I am able to spend the majority of my time with teachers and in classrooms on campus. Unlike some of my colleagues on other campuses, I have no administrative duties that interfere with my ability to be in classrooms and working with teachers. For example, I am not assigned lunch duty and do not attend meetings outside of the scope of instruction. Beyond my work with individual teachers, I also facilitate team planning for each grade level and course for approximately six hours a week. During that time, I attempt to keep coaching at the forefront and look for opportunities to engage with teachers in personalized coaching in the future during that time. Team planning is an effective jumping off point for a coaching cycle. This is usually when teachers ask to participate in coaching because that is when we are planning the daily activities

for class. My goal is to be very thoughtful and purposeful in this time because this is when I have the opportunity to collaborate with teachers that I am not necessarily engaging with on a daily basis.

Additionally, Curriculum and Instruction provides all professional development and training for instructional coaches across grade levels and campuses. There are six two hour trainings throughout the year that include both new and experienced coaches. New coaches train during a half-day long introduction before the school year begins. At this time, I am one of the trainers for instructional coaches in the district and am responsible for training instructional coaches and teacher leaders at all grade levels and across contents. I work with our Executive Director over Curriculum and Instruction to develop these trainings, which mostly center around Jim Knight's coaching approach (Knight, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018).

I also have been in the process of developing a training to give this summer that covers the central tenets of instructional coaching for principals and school administrators. The goal of that training is to build shared vision and expectations for instructional coaches throughout the district. We have not conducted this type of training in the past, which has perhaps led to a discrepancy in how coaches are used on different campuses in the district. As we are trying to move instructional coaching forward, all stakeholders need to be on the same page with vision and expectations. SEISD is attempting to maximize the impact of instructional coaches and has realized that everyone needs to be involved in the process. It is a significant financial investment to designate campus-level coaches, and the district is working towards streamlining their role. To do that, principals and other administrators must be involved. Our district is committed to putting decision making power on campuses, so without principal support, instructional coaches will potentially not have the opportunity to fully engage in the work. The purpose of this training,

then, is to develop a vision for the purpose of instructional coaches and how to utilize their time throughout the district.

Important Terms

- ELL: English Language Learner
- EOC: End of Course exam
- ESSA: Every Child Succeeds Act
- LEP: Limited English Proficient
- NCLB: No Child Left Behind
- PLC: Professional Learning Community
- SPED: Students qualifying for Special Education services
- STAAR: State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness

Closing Thoughts

In South East ISD, high stakes end of course exams have exposed challenges in English performance. Standardized assessments are a gateway to graduation. As a result, Instructional coaching has increased in popularity in response to the continuing pressure of stronger academic performance in statewide and national tests. My role as a campus based instructional coach has given me the unique opportunity to engage with English teachers in instructional coaching. This research focuses on the impact of instructional coaching on the comfort level and confidence of high school English teachers, especially when choosing strategies for and working with striving learners who are in need of re-testing.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

High stakes testing is a constant reality for Texas schools. Texas high school students are required to *approach standard* on the English I and English II State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) at the end of their freshmen and sophomore years. Students must be successful on both exams in order to qualify for graduation. If students do not *approach standard* on either exam, they will continue to sit for the exam. A high rate of re-testers facing the STAAR remain throughout Texas schools, putting students at risk of not graduating from high school. English teachers at the sophomore, junior, and senior levels serve students who have continually performed below expectations on the STAAR exams for English I and II. Along with on-level English II, III, and English IV curriculum, teachers are responsible for providing intervention for English I and II skills. Because of the large numbers of students in need of re-testing, the scope of on-level instruction has changed.

A variety of factors contributes to this problem, including the need for effective initial literacy instruction and intervention for older striving students. The large number of re-testers requires a broad approach going beyond one intervention teacher or generalized program. This research focuses on the role of the instructional coach in partnering with teachers to best increase their comfort levels in working with re-testing students and how coaching can impact facilitating effective intervention. Because of purposeful instructional coaching based on respect, trust, and partnership, I posit that teachers will become more comfortable and develop increased confidence in working with all learners. Perhaps because of increased teacher confidence, student academic growth will also be impacted.

Alignment with Action Research Tradition

This study aligns with the teacher researcher movement in North America that began in the 1940s and 1950s. The tradition of North American action research emphasizes the importance of teachers generating the research process. The task of "reprofessionalizing" the teaching craft and validating teachers' knowledge and skills is central to the movement (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 28). This framework puts the research and knowledge in the hands of practicing educators- shifting the power from outside sources to those in service (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 29). In an effort to remain authentic and spark lasting change, my goal as the researcher is to put the power in the hands of teachers. Empowering teachers and valuing them as professionals is also one of the major foundations of instructional coaching (Knight, 2013). Not only will the research experience serve as an opportunity for professional development for both the teacher and myself as their partner in instructional coaching, it also centers on the power of in-service teachers in generating knowledge (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 30).

The chart below outlines the conceptual framework of this study. Along with the high failure rate on English I and II STAAR exams, SEISD has also eliminated separate intervention courses that previously served these students. These factors have led to a large number of STAAR re-testers enrolled in English II, III, and IV courses, who are in need of both on-level curriculum and STAAR intervention. In order to develop a teacher's sense of confidence and comfort in working with striving learners, I suggest that focused instructional coaching should be utilized in SEISD. I propose that this will help to develop a personalized teacher-centered instructional coaching model that will lead to the implementation of highly effective intervention

strategies and to a long-term commitment to an instructional coaching partnership between the coach and teachers.

Conceptual Framework

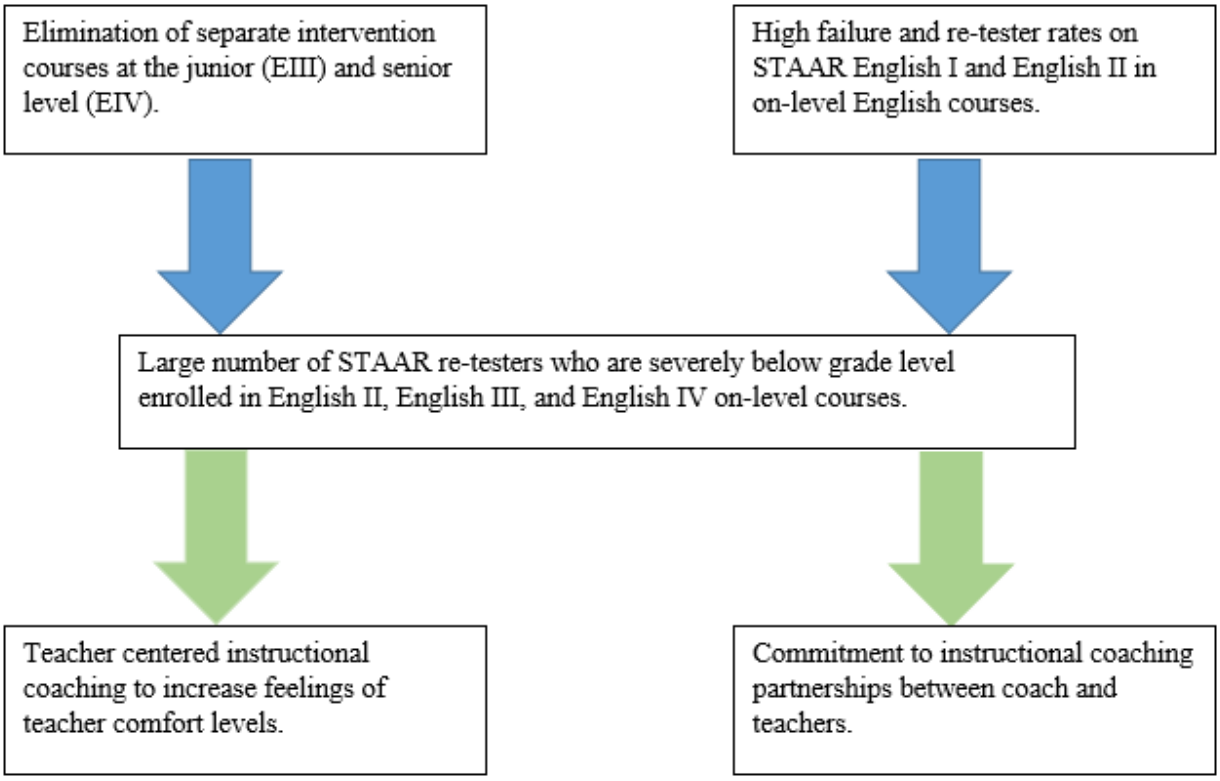

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework. This figure outlines the causes of the problem, the problem, and potential solutions that are explored in this study.

Relevant Historical Background

The implementation of No Child Left Behind (2001) marked a significant transition in public education because of the new focus on standardized assessment and accountability. NCLB started with the premise that schools would change when the government was able to publicize their assessments record, hold them accountable, identify their failures, and then create

interventions (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). What began with the worthy goal of educating every child became overshadowed by aggression, mistrust, and disdain for the very professionals that are doing the work. The assumption of NCLB was that by centralizing policy and accountability, local schools and districts would change to meet the new requirements (Sunderman & Kim, 2004; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Schools, however, are complex systems that are not creating products, but instead caring for and educating unique children. NCLB narrowed the focus of education to academic assessment to such an extent that other complexities were ignored (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). It soon became clear that more testing and accountability did not automatically lead to higher achievement. As a result, schools were left to work within a demanding system of assessment.

The 2002 Federal Register, which discusses updates to Title I funding, suggests a positive intent. The recurring theme is insurance that every child is monitored and no one can slip through the cracks. In this view, school and teacher accountability will lead to increased academic achievement (Department of Education, 2002). The plan outlines the monitoring of sub-groups, special populations, and those groups otherwise pushed to the outskirts of the system, such as special education students and limited English proficient students (Department of Education, 2002). The assumption appears to be that students were not performing to a higher academic standard because schools had not been held accountable. Unfortunately, accountability alone does not progress make. Federal accountability brings up another host of issues as the beast becomes bigger and more difficult to feed. Schools were essentially left with the same or even fewer resources to meet the demands of re-assessment (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) struggles with similar issues. State assessment data and intensive monitoring of that data is paramount with even more sub-populations

monitored, such as homeless children under the McKinney-Vinto Act, students in the foster system, and students with parents in active military duty (Department of Education, 2016). Instead of simplifying the maze of data, schools now had even more. The most significant change from NCLB to ESSA concerns the certification of teachers, not assessment (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Assessment and accountability are therefore still at the center of education policy. That is a small window into the bustling and complex life of a district, a school, and an individual student. Texas's current exam, STAAR, has only proven a larger challenge for English Language Arts as scores have not shown significant improvement statewide. With the state and federal demands of high stakes testing only continuing to increase, South East ISD understood that a change was necessary. As a result, instructional coaches came into high needs testing areas. This study focuses specifically on high school English teachers with a large number of re-testing students and their work with instructional coaches.

Literacy Instruction

The English I and English II STAAR exams focus on assessing reading and writing skills. Despite the emphasis on reading and writing in standardized assessment, literacy instruction and intervention have a much broader reach. Literacy instruction belongs in a "larger classroom environment, and learning to read, write, speak, listen, and view is contextualized" in all learning experiences (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, p. 11). Literacy is at the center of all interactions and experiences. Therefore, literacy is defined as the "currency of other learning" (Fisher et al., 2016, p. 3). Considering this definition, a major component of literacy instruction is emphasizing student engagement and putting learning into their hands to provide appropriate challenge, the opportunity for self-efficacy, and an understanding of what qualifies as mastery of

a skill (Anderson & LaRocca, 2017; Fisher et al., 2016). Again, this puts the power of literacy in the hands of students. Effective literacy instruction is paramount in order for students to engage with all other learning.

The foundation of literacy for all other learning indicates the need for highly effective and purposeful literacy instruction. Common characteristics of effective literacy instruction include purposefully planned and well-managed classrooms, which emphasizes high levels of engagement (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). Literature suggests that student engagement coupled with learning invites students to authentically develop literacy skills (Anderson & LaRocca, 2017; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Knight, 2016). Because of the importance of these skills, facilitating access for students in literacy instruction is key. Literacy is simply too important to miss opportunities to provide access for all students. Committing to providing "equity of access to excellence" is a central need in the English classroom (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 35). Highly effective literacy instruction is dependent on reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, but as indicated by Gallagher and Kittle after a year-long experience studying the impact of choice reading and writing in their classrooms, the most important aim of literacy instruction should be teaching students how to interpret the world around them (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). The ability to interpret the world fundamentally empowers human beings. This goal connects to the definition of literacy as central to all other learning.

Literacy Strategies

With increasing academic demands, schools and teachers have sought strategies that will provide more engagement and access for all students during literacy instruction (Baugh, 2017; Horn & Staker, 2015). Teachers work with students to read, write, think, and interpret critically

in a time when standardization is at the foundation of expectations. Teaching reading and writing in the age of standardized testing is actually working against developing independence as standardization goes against becoming a successful reader, writer, and thinker (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). Again, these challenges emphasize the need for choosing strategies and methods that will engage all learners and empower them through literacy.

An approachable way to increase student engagement in learning is to focus on questioning. Ensuring that students are participating is important; however, designing instruction to facilitate rigorous thinking should be central in planning (Lemov, 2015; Knight, 2013). Part of effective questioning is finding a balance between building engagement with foundational questioning and moving towards higher level questioning that will be both rigorous and accessible (Lemov, 2015). In Lemov's model, all students must have both the opportunity and expectation to participate. When students expect to answer questions at any time, they are more likely to stay engaged. To ensure maximum effectiveness, questions should be purposeful and pre-planned. There are four criteria to consider when planning quality questions that "promote one or more carefully defined instructional purposes, focus on important content, facilitate thinking at a stipulated cognitive level, and communicate clearly what is being asked" (Walsh & Sattes, 2005, p. 23). These criteria lead teachers to use questioning as a vehicle to assessment while also keeping students engaged in their learning. Additionally, all students should have the expectation of demonstrating their learning. If all students expect to answer questions at any given time, a culture of "engaged accountability" develops in the classroom (Lemov, 2015, p. 250). The goal is engagement and questions have the ability to facilitate that process.

When questioning in this manner, it is important to avoid overwhelming or pressuring students to produce the "right" answer, especially if they are vulnerable striving learners.

Additionally, focusing solely on participation may work against higher level thinking (Zemel & Koschmann, 2010). Participation alone does not necessarily encourage complexity of thought. Questioning could also become a negative experience for students. Feedback should remain positive focused on attempts at critical thinking rather than correct answers (Waring, 2008). Instead of a correction, instructors may need to re-think how they are asking the question and make changes, which responsive to student needs (Zemel & Koschmann, 2010). This will require a combination of thorough planning and flexibility. Positive feedback may not always be appropriate, however, and at times "wrong" answers are incorrect. Instead, effective planning includes anticipating where students may struggle when questioning and preparing to provide thoughtful intervention (Lemov, 2015, 2017). Students should be treated with respect during questioning and in all interactions. Designing opportunities for students to engage effectively with their learning is essential for growth in literacy, and purposefully designed questions with a focus on participation have the ability to increase student engagement.

Engagement, whether through reading, writing, listening, or in the ability to evaluate the world, leads to power. Engaging students should therefore be a central goal of literacy instruction (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). Without access to the content, engagement is not possible. Classrooms require differentiation when providing access to all students. A differentiated classroom facilitates "access to learning, motivation, engagement, relevance, efficiency of learning, appropriate level of challenge, and the opportunity to express learning," (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 83). Planning for differentiation is crucial. Small group stations are a powerful way to provide all students with access to the content based on their individual needs. Using stations, different small groups work on different tasks (Tomlinson, 2014). Instead of blanket instruction where every student receives the same lesson in the same way, small group stations allow for

differentiation within each group. Students may participate in every station or only in the ones designated by the teacher. This provides both access to students in need of extra support and allows for students who have already mastered the skill to grow (Tomlinson, 2014). Stations could include a variety of activities and approaches to allow for a more personalized experience based on student needs (Horn & Staker, 2015). Acknowledging that all students learn differently is central to using stations effectively. Stations provide students the opportunity to encounter content and skills in a variety of ways. Small group stations also encourage students to work with peers, which further engages students with the content and facilitates important practice in communication and collaboration (Kay & Greenhill, 2011). Engagement is the backbone of student-centered learning; therefore, instruction should be designed surrounding ways to differentiate learning for the purpose of access.

With literacy viewed as the gateway to all other learning, providing initial instruction and intervention that will engage and empower students in how they are interacting with the world around them should be the focus. To engage learners, they need the opportunity for "meaningful, important, and relevant" learning experiences, especially in literacy instruction (Knight, 2013, p. 44). Understanding the power of literacy in the classroom emphasizes that "every moment matters," (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018, p. 5). When every moment matters, instruction must be purposeful. The question then moves to how educators can maximize those classroom moments when serving students.

Instructional Intervention

We must rethink instructional approaches in the classroom and academic intervention for our older learners working to meet standard on state assessments to provide significant change in

student literacy outcomes. Facilitating intervention for striving learners should first explore the foundation of effective initial instruction (Mattos & Weber, 2015). Teachers should also be looking towards potential needs surrounding intervention in connection with strong initial instruction. When working with striving learners in the English classroom, the intervention approach should be structured enough to implement with fidelity but general and flexible enough to allow for a level of personalization (Paul & Clarke, 2016). An effective intervention program should involve all stakeholders; however, most schools are reliant on individual teachers to meet all students' intervention needs (Buffum et al., 2009). Effective instruction, much less the demands of intervention, is difficult to provide in isolation. The opportunity for teachers to work with teams, partners, coaches, and administrators to maximize time and impact in instruction and intervention is essential to continued academic growth (Barkley, 2010; Knight & Fullan, 2010; Mattos & Buffum, 2011). When approaching complex tasks, such as individualizing instruction and intervention based on need, teachers need the opportunity to collaborate. Partnering with coaches has the potential to benefit teachers when planning initial instruction and intervention. Therefore, school systems and processes center around teacher growth at the forefront (Marzano, 2017). Solving complex problems does not happen in isolation, and schools should be no different (Mattos & Buffum, 2015). The opportunity to work with a partner such as an instructional coach could have an impact on how teachers are designing and implementing instruction.

Reflecting on instructional practice and working together will help educators to move towards teaching for understanding and lifelong learning as opposed to the specific content and test taking skills. With a shift toward authentic learning for the future, reading and writing skills will also improve (Wan & Gut, 2011). Curriculum revisions and organizational change

surrounding intervention and enrichment are valuable; however, teacher growth will prove to be the cornerstone of long-term student growth (Marzano, 2017). Teachers must be treated as professionals, which also includes individualized and meaningful professional development focused on effective instruction and intervention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Knight, 2013).

There are approaches to help students grow and develop essential literacy skills; however, teachers need access and support when incorporating a wide variety of strategies to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers have the greatest potential for impact when intervention is differentiated based on the student. Highly effective intervention is dependent on individualizing the instructional approach, which is a complex task (Fisher et al., 2016, p. 4). Knight maintains a similar perspective; he emphasizes the importance of determining each student's instructional strengths and needs (Knight, 2013). Based on that individual determination, teachers have more opportunities to utilize the most effective instructional approach for each student (Bean & Ippolito, 2017; Knight, 2013; Tomlinson, 2014).

In addition to the complexity of providing differentiation in literacy instruction intervention on the whole can be a challenging task because it has traditionally relied on the discrepancy model (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009). At times, this has led to misdiagnosis of students with special needs, stalls in early intervention, a lack of students successfully exiting special education, and an over-reliance on temporarily promising but ultimately ineffective intervention programs (Buffum et al., 2009). Instead of focusing on what students "cannot do," we must be able to identify the student's present capabilities or entry knowledge, which can be unfamiliar for upper-level secondary teachers and administration (Costa & Garmston, 1985). Academic success or failure is not the most important label an older striving learner carries, but instead attention should center on the "unique and intangible attitudes toward learning" that has a

significant impact on student achievement (Baugh, 2017, p. 229). Older striving learners have sometimes not met academic standard for years, and they bring unique challenges and gifts to the classroom because of these potential feelings of failure and inadequacy. How students are interacting with their learning environment is central to continued growth. It is important, then, to shift to building on student strengths. Starting from a position of strength will change how students are engaging both in the content and with their learning as a whole.

Commitment to Instructional Coaching

In continuing to focus on instruction, intervention, and an understanding of what older striving students need, instructional coaching is potentially the key to long term change and academic growth. Since the advent of NCLB in 2001, instructional coaching has become an increasingly popular avenue to support teachers in meeting the new demands of education (Kurz, Reddy, & Glover, 2017). A teacher's ability to implement high quality instruction has a significant impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Marzano, 2017). Supporting teachers should not be confused with lightening teachers' workloads. The intention is to provide teachers with consistent support, feedback, and opportunities for reflection in order to make their practice more effective (Killion & Harrison, 2006; Wang, 2017). Improving practice is central. While providing assistance for teachers is a valuable enterprise, lasting change will come by helping to build teacher capacity in meeting these demands (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Killion, 2009).

Content specific coaching has also proven beneficial for student success. Matsumura, Garnier, and Spybrook explored the impact of literacy specific coaching in a longitudinal study involving 167 teachers in a group-randomized trial (Matsumura, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2012).

This study focused specifically on coaches working with teachers to increase the level of text discussions in English classrooms. Teachers worked with instructional coaches to focus on specific strategies to increase classroom discussion. A correlation between instructional coaching and the quality of classroom discussions demonstrated a positive correlation. The authors suggested further partnerships between teachers and content specific coaches. In this study, time and access to coaches specializing in literacy increased student reading performance, demonstrating the potential for student achievement growth and instructional coaching (Matsumura, et al., 2012). A focused goal and continued engagement between teacher and coach provided the foundation for this study. Similarly, Coburn and Woulfin found a positive connection between instructional coaching and reading instruction at the elementary level (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). This longitudinal study focused on one urban elementary school in Massachusetts attempting to meet the demands of high stakes reading assessments over two years. Data was focused on first and second grade reading performance in an effort to understand how instructional coaching impacted early reading intervention. Coaches in this study were involved with administrators, teachers, and students as they attempted to plan for and model best practices in reading instruction (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). Again, focused coaching that engaged teachers in long term relationships proved to be beneficial to teacher and student performance.

Coaching in other professions has also become popular outside of education. Considering coaching in the business world, Fournies points out the importance of support in developing and retaining valued employees in the workforce. Although seemingly far from education, Fournies emphasizes similar elements to instructional coaching: trust, respect, and development as means of capacity building. When this happens for individual employees, everyone benefits (Fournies,

2000). Growth is key- not because professionals are not already talented and effective- but instead because people inherently want to achieve their best. The same principles apply to education. Teachers must be treated as professionals that are striving for their personal best (Knight, 2013). Focused instructional coaching will lead to individualized support, student learning, and valued changes, all of which align to the literacy needs of older striving learners and their teachers (Matsumura, et al., 2012; Teemant, 2013).

Along with large class loads, ever-changing standards and pressure to perform has created new demands for teachers and schools. Educators of children who are most at risk should be the most highly qualified and prepared to teach a diverse range of learners; however, they are often underprepared coming into education and then lack continued education and staff development that will help maximize student learning (Buffum, et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2009). Beyond a potentially neutral impact, traditional professional development has the potential to set teachers back as it does not respect the individual needs of teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Knight, 2013). Teaching is complex and highly individualized. Teachers will therefore require a more specialized approach to professional development than generalized sessions can offer (Barkley, 2010; Desimone & Pak, 2017). Far beyond a traditional training, Marzano suggests five steps in the teacher development process: teachers start with a self-audit, track their progress, have opportunities to reflect, work in collaborative teams, and have the opportunity to engage in coaching (Marzano, 2017, p. 104). When approaching the demands of teaching students with different needs and strengths, comprehensive professional development and support is essential. As teachers continue to grow, so will student learning.

Teaching striving learners is a unique endeavor, and without proper support, making up gaps in student learning, much less accomplishing high levels of learning for all students, can be

difficult. Instructional coaching has the ability to provide teachers the support required to meet the needs of all learners. The purpose is to improve teaching practices to affect student success (Tanner, Quintis, & Gamboa, 2017). Improvement will be achieved by supporting teachers as they continue to think critically and find their own agency to think and act for the betterment of student learning (Key et al., 2010; Costa & Garmston, 2016). The question remains as to the best approach for strategies and intensive intervention when initial instruction is not meeting students' needs. Instructional coaching is a powerful avenue to ensure effective initial instruction along with intervention and enrichment.

Ideally, instructional leaders and colleagues are willing to do the work in a trusting and non-evaluative way, putting them in a unique position to create change. The most important aspect is trust. Through a trusting partnership, teachers are able to build confidence and move forward. Especially with students who have not experienced academic success, it is essential that leaders have and display hope in their fight for seemingly lost causes (Fullan, 1998). With consistent and thoughtful coaching, teachers will have the tools and support to continue fighting for our most vulnerable students. Educators want to do what is best for students; however, they need time, space, and support to think through potential issues and challenges (Key et al., 2010). Just as teachers believe in the best from their students, instructional coaches do the same for both teachers and their students. Despite challenges, when people are empowered, they perform better. The key to empowering teachers through a successful coaching partnership is a non-evaluative relationship based on trust, care, and a shared vision for student learning. The strategies in which coaches recommend or offer teachers are secondary. This allows teachers to engage with the strategies. In a strong relationship, the teacher and coach work together to improve student outcomes. The process may be difficult, which makes it essential to commit to a

non-judgmental relationship in working with teachers. Instead, teachers should be recognized, valued, and empowered to maximize their unique skill sets (Key et al., 2010; Marzano, 2017). No one teacher or classroom is the same. By empowering teachers, they will in turn be more able to empower their students in the process (Wang, 2017). Large scale changes are made possible by individual growth for both teachers and students. Instructional coaching is a "capacity-building instrument for promoting individual and system-level instructional change" (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017, p. 323). With an increase in teacher capacity, student outcomes will improve, and the entire system has the opportunity for long-term growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Marzano, 2017). Personalized support leads to the possibility of growth in teacher capacity.

Every teacher brings unique gifts and challenges to an incredibly complex job. With such a wide array of experiences and skill sets, teachers deserve a highly individualized approach (Tanner, Quintis, & Gamboa, 2017). Much like teaching students, coaching teachers is not a linear process. Personalization at every step leads to maximum benefits to teachers and students (Wang, 2017). Instructional coaching should respond to teachers' individual needs based on high expectations for learning for all students (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). To work most effectively with teachers, instructional coaches need to engage them in meaningful dialogue. Teachers need an opportunity to provide space to voice concerns about challenges and struggles they may face in the classroom (Bean & Ippolito, 2016; Tanner et al., 2017). Similar to generalized professional development, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work to meet students' or teachers' needs. The classroom is much too complex for a generalized plan.

Instructional coaching encourages teachers to be reflective in their practice and then make continuous and long-term improvement (Barkley, 2010; Bean & Ippolito, 2016). Thinking about the process like athletic coaching encourages coaches to help teachers remain flexible and

"read" different situations in order to make decisions and adapt in the classroom setting (Joyce & Showers, 1982, p. 7). This is about much more than the outward lesson or planning but instead addresses the internal process that teachers experience on a daily basis. Truly accomplished teachers "know how to select specific teaching acts from their repertoire of behaviors based on what they know about their learners, the teaching task, and the instructional situation" (Costa & Garmston, 1985, p. 72). A central goal of the cognitive coaching model is to leverage instructional coaches and leaders in creating self-directed and empowered teachers. Critical thinking and decision making skills are crucial. These skills will benefit teachers beyond a coaching cycle or relationship (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Successful teachers are able to move forward despite whatever unexpected challenges arise. Effective instructional coaching should then allow teachers to reflect on their own thinking and processes, making the internal explicit.

Approaches to Instructional Coaching

A variety of approaches to instructional coaching exists, and the field continues to grow. In response to high-stakes testing and the increasing demands of 21st century learning, school districts are continually looking for alternative solutions. The expectations and approach to instructional coaching vary, as is demonstrated by Killion and Harrison with their outline of the ten most common roles of instructional coaches: resource provider, data coach, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner (Killion & Harrison, 2006). All of these roles likely apply to coaches in South East ISD; however, the central purpose of instructional coaches in our district is to partner with teachers to facilitate student growth. While a great deal of options exist to achieve this goal, this review of the literature focuses on the approaches most commonly used in South

East ISD, specifically Cognitive Coaching as developed by Costa and Garmston and Knight's partnership approach (Costa & Garmston, 2016; Knight, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018).

Understanding the purpose and central tenets of instructional coaching is imperative for teachers and coaches to make effective change. The first step is communicating a conceptual model that clearly supports the intended actions and concepts of coaching (Kurz et al., 2017). Teachers, administration, and the instructional coach must agree on the intended outcomes and actions. Every stakeholder needs to understand the purpose of instructional coaching, or there is a risk for coaches to be utilized in less impactful ways and to meet resistance from teachers and other colleagues (Kurz et al., 2017; Sweeney, 2013). This will undermine the process and potentially waste valuable time and resources. With the importance of shared vision in mind, outcomes require development based on the goals of the school or district for instructional coaching. Shared vision when developing roles for coaches is key because of the potential for a wide range of coaching responsibilities (Aguilar, 2013; Bean & Ippolito, 2012; Killion & Harrison, 2006). The intended outcome of this type of program, which targets teachers of older striving learners, would be performance enhancement in the form of student academic achievement. The actions to achieve this outcome are questioning, setting goals, assessing, planning, demonstrating, critiquing, evaluating, and adjusting (Kurz et al., 2017). Each step towards achieving the intended outcome requires communication with all stakeholders in order to be successful. Every stakeholder needs a voice in the process.

Cognitive coaching as developed by Costa and Garmston (2016) centers around creating self-directed lifelong teachers and learners. Through re-thinking practice, instructional moves, planning decisions, data, and reflection, teachers are empowered to face the challenges of the classroom. As teachers' mindsets shift and they develop more independence, they become

increasingly confident and able to face complex situations. This model is non-evaluative and non-judgmental, which is similar to other instructional coaching protocols. The components of cognitive coaching include skills, capabilities, mental maps, beliefs, values, and commitments, "all of which are practiced, tested over time and assimilated into a person's day-to-day interactions" (Costa & Garmston, 2016, p. 6-7). While a natural talent certainly exists in teaching, cognitive coaching lifts the mysterious veil on "great" teaching and instead emphasizes the mindset and thought processes involved in being a great teacher.

In the cognitive approach, the instructional coach is not a consultant, collaborator, or evaluator. The coach instead serves as a partner in developing metacognition and decision-making processes. As the teacher grows and changes his/her mindset, so does the coach (Costa & Garmston, 2016). They are not singularly focused on observable behavior- a teacher's entire mental framework is central in this approach. The strategies concentrate on the teacher's internal thinking processes, which then impacts observable behaviors, finally leading to enhanced teacher and student performance (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Reflection is central, as reflection allows teachers and coaches to think about their thought process and moves that they made during instruction (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Without reflection, the authors maintain that the deeper complexities of decision making are lost (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Skills are important in this model, but the process of reflection when evaluating the instructional experience is key (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Much like other approaches, cognitive coaching maintains that change is constant. The most effective teachers and coaches are in a continuous growth cycle (Aguilar, 2013; Bean & Ippolito, 2016; Costa & Gramston, 2016). There is never an end to growth.

South East ISD draws primarily from Jim Knight's approach. At the time of hiring and training instructional coaches, South East ISD sought a program that was both easy to follow and

that provided clear structure for the coach, teacher, and administrator. Knight defines the role of the instructional coach as a "partner with teachers to analyze current reality, set goals, identify and explain teaching strategies to meet goals, and provide support until the goals are met" (Knight, 2018, p. 3). People do not improve and change in isolation. The most effective way to improve in any area of life is with a partner, which is the foundation of Knight's approach (Knight, 2018). Coaches are partners in helping teachers to achieve their personal best through the coaching relationship (Knight, 2013). It is essential for teachers to be partners in this process. Like other models, reflection is central. Partnership facilitates the reflection process for teachers and coaches (Knight, 2013, 2018). Without reflection, progress will stagnate because partners will miss the opportunity for deeper reflection on the instructional process (Knight, 2013, 2018). The reflection process should give teachers an opportunity to interact with the coach in a non-evaluative and respectful way, but it is also open and honest. Positive interactions and "witnessing the good" are cornerstones to this approach, as long-term growth comes through a trusting and non-combative relationship (Knight, 2013, p. 317). Instructional coaching can and will potentially impact teacher behavior and student outcomes; however, the coach does not come into the coaching cycle with a deficit mindset. In this model, instructional coaching relationships focus on building from strengths.

Knight outlines partnership principles to be agreed upon and followed in the relationship. The principles consist of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis (making the process productive), and reciprocity (Knight, 2018, p. 5). The principle of equality maintains that the participants are equal partners. This automatically excludes an evaluator or consultant relationship with teachers. The coach treats teachers as equal partners instead of trying to persuade or manipulate the teacher to their own beliefs. Choice emphasizes that teachers should

have a choice in what and how they learn professional concepts and strategies. The respect for teachers is clear in this principle. Teachers should be trusted to make their own decisions concerning the content and delivery of professional development. Teachers are professionals and should be treated as such in terms of professional development. Voice is a close companion to choice. Professional learning and interactions should respect the voice of teachers. Avoiding top down directives in this model is key. The voice of teachers is respected and sought after. Dialogue emphasizes the necessity of authentic interactions between teacher and coach. Again, the role of evaluator will not work when respecting authentic dialogue. To truly communicate with another person, judgment must be left at the door, otherwise the conversations are at risk of being aggressive and combative (Knight, 2007).

Like other approaches to instructional coaching, reflection is essential. Purposeful reflection leads to growth. There is much to be learned in a teacher's reflection on instructional practices, and reflection helps teachers to make change based on the process of reflection. Distinguished from theory, the praxis principle emphasizes teachers applying their professional knowledge to real-life situations. Knight describes the importance of praxis as a practical way to apply knowledge. Power through practical application helps teachers to face the complex and unique challenges of the classroom (Knight, 2018). Perhaps the most important principle is reciprocity. Each partner should expect to get back the level of work that they give. Like any true partnership, one partner cannot expect more than he/she is willing to give (Knight, 2009). These principles encourage building a trusting relationship and mutual commitment to a common goal, which is to ensure high levels of learning for all students.

If a teacher is unwilling to participate in coaching, forcing the relationship would be against the partnership principles, and the coach should move on with the plan of circling back to

the unwilling teacher. Coaching, therefore, cannot be prescribed by administrators or used as another tool for evaluation (Knight, 2017). Coaches are a resource for instructional growth, but the foundation of coaching relies on choice. It cannot be administrative or evaluative or the relationship will not have the opportunity to grow. To prescribe coaching may lead to short-term success, but teachers must fully invest for coaching to have a long-term impact (Knight, 2017). Time could be spent more purposefully with willing teachers is wasted when coaching is forced (Sweeney, 2013).

The process is cyclical, which creates a sense of continuous improvement for both the teacher and instructional coach (Knight, 2007). With a commitment to focused instructional coaching, upper-grade level teachers, who have otherwise had less recent experience with older striving learners, will potentially be empowered to build capacity in meeting these students' needs. Knight maintains that there is no end to the potential for growth and improvement. Commitment to growth is one of the defining characteristics of professionalism (Knight, 2011). Fournies also echoes this belief in his work on coaching business professionals. According to the author, treating employees as if there is no room to grow and change undermines the very nature of professionalism (Fournies, 2000). Commitment to growth is not to suggest that teachers are lacking. Instead, it is a demonstration of respect for teachers as professionals.

Instructional coaching has demonstrated the potential for success. For example, Fullan and Knight researched the impact of the program on a large group of elementary and secondary schools in Canada. The school district served 192 schools and worked to implement an instructional coaching program that was district wide. The authors tracked progress over a period of ten years. With a focus on building instructional capacity through the partnership principles, literacy and math scores raised 14% in elementary schools and the graduation rate in high

schools has gone from 68 to 81 percent (Fullan & Knight, 2011, p. 52). Instructional coaches in these schools have committed to empowering teachers and increasing the effectiveness of instruction through a partnership with teachers and administrators (Fullan & Knight, 2011). According to the authors, the keys to the success of the Canadian district's program were clearly defined roles for each stakeholder, creating explicit goals, providing training for coaches, and maintaining commitment to continuous professional development (Fullan & Knight, 2011, p. 51).

Jim Knight's Coaching Model

SEISD bases their instructional coaching program on Jim Knight's *Impact Cycle* (2018) with a primary focus on coach and teacher partnership. When teachers are truly partners, it is their decision on how to move forward in their practice and how they would like to learn. This is a partnership, not a top-down approach. Instead, the relationship is based on respect. Knight outlines the differences between a top-down and a partnership approach in *The Impact Cycle* (2018). While a top-down approach requires compliance, partnership emphasizes commitment between partners. In partnership, the people inside the classroom know what students need as opposed to a top-down approach where people outside of the classroom dictate what students need. In partnership, the individual is key. While constructive feedback is used in a top-down approach, dialogue among equals is the center of partnership where the teacher does most of the thinking and reflecting. Partnership at its core is non-judgmental and teachers have equal status with coaches. In partnership, the coach and teacher are first and foremost accountable to students, not leaders or administrators (Knight, 2018, p. 6). Although varying slightly among authors, equality and partnership are a common thread throughout many works on instructional

coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Bean & Ippolito, 2016; Costa & Garmston, 2016; Key, et al., 2010; Sweeny, 2013; Toll, 2018). At the heart of all of these works is a deep respect for teachers, not a culture of accusation and blame.

With equal partnership at the forefront, Knight outlines three phases in the impact cycle. Three phases may seem simple, but coaching is like a dance, full of changes and unexpected moves (Aguilar 2013). The partners may know the foundation of the dance, but they are constantly responding to the other, making changes, pulling back, and stepping forward (Aguilar, 2013, p. 147). The instructional coach cannot just follow the protocol by the book and expect a specific outcome. Every teacher's experience is different. There is a need for flexibility in approaching different teachers and situations (Bean & Ippolito, 2016, p. 29). Although Knight establishes a protocol in how instructional coaches can most effectively work with teachers, he still contends that every teacher, coach, and situation is unique.

The first phase in the impact cycle is to identify, which focuses on identifying a clear picture of reality. Instead of seeing what we want to be true or perceive to be true, this phase focuses on what is really happening in a classroom. Teachers and coaches can achieve this by using video, interacting with students, and reviewing data from observations (Knight, 2018, p. 24). The second portion of the identify stage is setting goals that will make an impact on student learning. Knight uses the PEERS model for goal setting, which defines effective goals as being powerful, easy, emotionally compelling, reachable, and student-focused (Knight, 2018, p. 62). More listening and less talking is the center of these conversations. In *The Coaching Habit*, Michael Bungay Stanier emphasizes the importance and difficulty of listening, describing the heart of change as "a little more asking people questions and a little less telling people what to do" (Stanier, 2016, p. 17). Although it may seem simple, listening and asking the right questions

are not always natural skills. Listening effectively is important in developing elements of trust. Knight defines good listening as "primarily about authentically wanting to hear what the other person has to say" as opposed to simply waiting for a break to get your own point in (Knight, 2018, p. 75). Like most people, at times a coach's instinct may be to come in and take over or to ask leading questions in order to direct the teacher to our own conclusion or desire. However, Knight argues that empowering teachers to set their own goals is essential in a successful coaching relationship (Knight, 2018). Coaches cannot dictate goals because that automatically shifts the balance of power in favor of the coach. Instructional coaching aims to empower teachers, not to facilitate more consulting or advice from the coach. When teachers are empowered, they are able to choose pathways for improvement, and then have hope for change that will lead to positive improvements for their students (Knight, 2018, p. 71).

Creating a welcoming environment is also important when working with teachers. Much of the success in coaching will come through the coach's skills in building relationships, which focus on the characteristics of connectivity, acceptance, and trustworthiness (Toll, 2018, p. 3). Coaches need to be purposeful in building trust. Knight outlines the five elements of building trust: character (are you honest and non-judgmental?), reliability (can you do what you say you will do?), competence (does your level of professional knowledge demonstrate to teachers that you can partner with them in achieving positive change?), warmth (are you able to make emotional connections?), and stewardship (are you willing to give to others before you are willing to give to yourself?) (Knight, 2018).

The last phase of the impact cycle is to improve. Improvement is the foundation of long-term growth, which will likely have the greatest impact on students. The center of improvement lies in making adjustments until accomplishment of a teacher's goal. Knight outlines the

necessary steps in improvement, including confirming the direction of coaching, reviewing processes to reflect on progress, inventing improvements, and planning next options (Knight, 2018, p. 130). Like every other phase of the impact cycle, improvement puts the power of decision making in the hands of the teacher. Essentially, the improvement phase attempts to answer the question "did we hit the goal?" using multiple pathways. Knight is not alone in his emphasis on reflection and the time needed to engage in this process. Reflection is an essential element to improvement, and teachers must have the time and appropriate support in reflection (Key, et al., 2010, p. 161). First, the teachers and coach will confirm direction to ensure that both are still on the same page (Knight, 2018). As the teacher and coach are usually in agreement in confirming direction, the next step is to review progress (Knight, 2018). Teachers should do the majority of the talking in this stage because they have objective data and have established a clear picture of reality.

After this discussion, the teacher and coach move into inventing improvements, which Knight identifies as the "heart of the Impact Cycle" (Knight, 2018, p. 140). Recognizing that teachers usually do not achieve their goal on the first attempt of a new strategy, Knight encourages creativity, flexibility, and patience at this stage. Coaches can approach this in a variety of ways, depending on teacher needs. Coaches can ask teachers if they want to keep using the strategy as is, to revisit how they are using the strategy and make changes, choose a new strategy, change the measurement of progress toward the goal, or to change the goal altogether. Empowering teachers means partnering with them in choice and facilitating their own decision-making process (Knight, 2018). At no stage in the impact cycle is teacher voice more important.

Finally, the teacher and coach will plan the next actions. This step ensures continuous improvement. Improvement does not end with the last step of coaching. It is a process that is

ongoing and requires long-term commitment, which will then lead to long-term change (Knight, 2018).

Closing Thoughts

The stakes are high for students in Texas high schools. As a large portion of students continue to strive to meet expectations on the English I and English II tests, students face the serious consequence of not qualifying for high school graduation. These students will require specialized support and intervention based on their individual strengths. Instructional coaching has the ability to empower teachers and create a partnership that will work towards the ultimate goal of ensuring high levels of learning for all students. Beyond quick fixes or immediate change, instructional coaching relies on long-term improvement and change. While there are several approaches to instructional coaching, to accomplish the goal of academic improvement, coaches must rely on a non-judgmental relationship based in mutual trust and respect.

CHAPTER III

SOLUTION AND METHOD

Proposed Solution

The proposed solution to the problem of teachers working with large numbers of STAAR re-testers enrolled in on-level classes is targeted instructional coaching with an emphasis on striving learners for participating sophomore, junior, and senior English teachers. Teachers and the instructional coach engaged in the Jim Knight instructional coaching model, specifically surrounding *The Impact Cycle* (2018), which outlines steps to identify, learn, and improve.

To begin, I explored the importance of the partnership principles with participants. At the beginning of every past coaching cycle, I always remind teachers of the partnership principles. This study took place at the end of the school year, so there were no questions about the partnership principles. Although I worked with all of these teachers before, I thought it important to revisit the partnership principles as the foundation of our coaching relationships. Teachers participating in the coaching cycle are equal partners in this research. The combination of teachers participating in a research study and the risk of a coach presented as a superior made adhering to the partnership principles even more important in my study.

After discussion of the partnership principles, teachers identified areas of strength and growth during the pre-conference stage. Teachers have the ultimate choice in how they would like to engage in coaching. Exploring their perception of their own classrooms gave teachers the opportunity to see where there is room for improvement and what is already going well in their classrooms. I then worked with participating teachers in making a PEERS goal during the pre-conference. This research intended to help teachers become more comfortable with all learners and to increase their feelings of confidence. Giving teachers the opportunity to create their own

goals was an important step in the process. I attempted to make the coaching cycle from this research reflect closely our normal coaching cycles.

Once teachers self-identified an area for improvement and set a goal, eight teachers moved to the learning phase. The learning phase focused on exploring teaching strategies by creating an instructional playbook, sharing checklists, and modeling strategies by co-teaching, visiting other teachers' classrooms, providing in-class models, and watching videos (Knight, 2018, p. 100). Strategies explored in Knight's *High-Impact Instruction* (2012) were the primary resource for strategies used in the learning phase. This text is organized by instructional goal. For example, if a teacher's goal is to increase levels of questioning, the text then offers options for strategies to work towards that goal. Teachers were also able to identify strategies from their teams or a training that they would like to try in their own classrooms.

For my research purposes, I tried to implement the instructional playbook outlined in *The Impact Cycle* with fidelity as much as possible in order to keep my coaching consistent (Knight, 2018). To my surprise, a commitment to the instructional playbook did not turn out to be necessary as the majority of teachers chose the same strategy, small group rotations. My research did not necessarily focus on a critique of strategies. Instead, this study attempts to understand teachers' feelings and experiences in the process of instructional coaching. Teachers in this study were encouraged to pick their own pathway for the learning phase. Reflection and flexibility were required in approaching different teachers and situations. For this research, purposeful differentiation was important. Some teachers were more comfortable with different aspects of modeling in the learning phase. In this record of study, I attempted to personalize the instructional coaching model by teacher while also consistently following the Knight protocol (Knight, 2018). I offered a variety of options to teachers in the strategies they chose to practice

and the means by which they would like to learn those strategies to ensure teachers have voice and choice as the partnership principles demand. Semi-structured interviews conducted during the research process tracked teachers' choices during this stage.

The last phase of the *impact cycle* is to improve. This phase centered on the post-conference semi-structured interview after instruction as well as the teacher's annotated lesson plan, which will be further discussed in the methods section. We then moved into inventing improvements. In my own research, remaining flexible in how to go about improvements was important in moving forward with teachers. Dictating my own opinions of what would improve their practice takes the power away from teachers. I am trying to understand how teachers feel after instructional coaching, which should mean that my opinion should be far removed from the process. Finally, the teacher and coach will plan the next actions. This step ensures continuous improvement. This part of the instructional coaching cycle was explored through the post-conference questions.

The Impact Cycle has the potential to empower teachers and instructional coaches to make meaningful changes in classrooms (Knight, 2018). The goal of this research was to understand how instructional coaching builds confidence and comfort level of teachers working with all learners. In *The Impact Cycle*, Jim Knight outlines a protocol that will allow both flexibility and form in teacher improvement, which made it an ideal solution to implement when considering the problem explored in this research (Knight, 2018).

At its center, instructional coaching demonstrates a great respect for teachers and their limitless potential for growth. It is for those reasons and commitment to professional development that I chose instructional coaching as the center of my study and was drawn specifically to *The Impact Cycle* as an avenue to be explored (Knight, 2018).

Study Context and Participants

This study was conducted at Southbelt High School in South East Independent School District. A little over 4,000 students attend Southbelt, which serves grades nine through twelve. Eight teachers participated in the study. Three teach English II, three teach English III, and two teach English IV. All teachers have STAAR re-testers in their classrooms. Each teacher volunteered to participate in the study after receiving an enrollment letter. Ten teachers received letters, nine responded that they would like to participate, but one taught classes that had few re-testers and therefore did not participate in the study.

Southbelt's English department is home to a talented and diverse group of teachers. Teachers seldom leave Southbelt, and there is low teacher turnover in school faculty. Many of our teachers have spent the entirety of their career at Southbelt, and several are Southbelt graduates. There is a deep pride in our community and school. The background of the eight participating teachers is included in the table below. All teacher names are pseudonyms.

Table 1.1
Participating Teachers

Teacher	Years Experience	Campuses	Level Experience
Ashley	15	All Southbelt High School	EIII (advanced and on-level) EIV (advanced and on-level) Remediation (EIV)
Beth	5	Intermediate First year at SBHS	7th and 8th grade English Special Education
Cora	12	All Southbelt High School	EII (advanced and on-level) EIII (advanced and on-level)
Diane	10	Intermediate Multiple high schools	7th Grade 8th Grade EII (on-level and SIOP)

Table 1.1 Continued
Participating Teachers

Teacher	Years Experience	Campuses	Level Experience
Erin	5	All Southbelt High School	Advanced (EII) On-Level
Frances	15	Intermediate First year at SBHS	7th Grade 8th Grade EII (on-level, Special Education) Reading Intervention (sophomore students)
Ginger	3	All Southbelt High School	EII (on-level and Special Education) EIII (on-level and Special Education)
Hannah	15	All Southbelt High School	EI (on-level and Special Education) EIII (on-level, Special Education, SIOP)

Ashley. Ashley has spent her entire career at Southbelt, grew up, and still lives in the neighborhood. In the coming years, Ashley "hopes to watch both of (her children) come to Southbelt" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Ashley indicated that "relationships with students" were here biggest classroom success (personal communication, April 3, 2019). For the past several years, she has been one of the teachers of honor at the Southbelt Shining Starts banquet, which celebrates the most influential teachers in top ranked seniors' lives. When asked about her biggest challenges during pre-conference, Ashley said, "the pressure to get them all graduated and on their way is really hard" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Ashley's goal for this instructional coaching cycle was to "increase engagement with an emphasis on striving learners using station rotations" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019).

Beth. Graduating from another South East ISD high school, this is Beth's first year at Southbelt. She previously taught in one of Southbelt's feeder schools and has taught intermediate out of district. In addition, her husband teaches at another intermediate school in SEISD. Beth said during pre-conference that "after two years out of district and having (her son), I was ready to come home to the district" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). In two years, her child will start kindergarten at our sister elementary school located right next door to Southbelt. Beth said, "I want (my son) to come here. I just really love the idea of committing to the place" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). I noted in my journal that one of Beth's most noticeable characteristics is that "she's always so calm. She never gets loud with and everyone stops to listen to her" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019). She attributes this to years of working in intermediate school where everything is noisy. In pre-conference she said, "I've gotten quiet over the years. I think it is doing intermediate. They get quiet when I get quiet," (personal communication, April 9, 2019). When asked about her greatest strengths in the classroom, Beth responded, "I guess persistence. I really don't give up no matter what" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). Her greatest challenge is "keeping everyone working at a high level. I want more for them, and honestly I want higher scores" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). As we discussed her goal for instructional coaching, I noted that Beth decided to "design a lesson centered around small groups that will have students rely on their groups and resources. She wants to plan together and then have me observe the class for student engagement" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019).

Cora. Cora was placed at Southbelt for student teaching by a local university and has never left. I wrote in my journal that she "jokes that she cannot leave because she has been in the

same room for twelve years and would need a moving crew to get out of that room" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Cora's husband also works in the English department at Southbelt, and their son is in the elementary school next to the high school. During pre-conference, Cora expressed that her biggest strength is "helping students to see how much they can do" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). When discussing challenges, Cora said, "I got stagnant being in English II, so I thought I wanted to move. Now I think my biggest challenge is understanding what this level needs" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Cora chose to focus on student engagement during instructional coaching, saying, "I haven't taught on-level in a long time, so sometimes I don't pay close enough attention to all the kids" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). I wrote in my journal that Cora's "goal is to increase student engagement when introducing *Gatsby*. She wants data on which kids are participating when she asks questions" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019).

Diane. As a Southbelt High School graduate, Diane seemed destined to make it back to her home campus. She spent several years teaching intermediate school at one of Southbelt's feeder campuses and spent three years at a different high school in SEISD. Diane said in pre-conference that "I avoided Southbelt as long as I could. I guess you always have to come home" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Much like Beth, Diane "always seems calm and uses a quiet voice with students" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Diane feels like her greatest strength in the classroom is "breaking things down to make sure everyone understands what to do" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). She said "I sometimes struggle when kids are super behind. I'm really bad about rewarding kids even when they're off track" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). In an effort to "help her striving learners to become more independent, Diane chose to create a lesson centered around small groups. Students will work

with their groups to complete the task using their resources. Diane wants them to work with one another instead of depending on her" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019).

Erin. Erin grew up with her mom, a high school math teacher, in a nearby district. Describing her teaching career, Erin said, "I have to credit my mom for me becoming a teacher. I wanted to be just like her," (personal communication, April 12, 2019). She now lives down the street from the house she grew up in and credits her mom for leading her into teaching. Like Cora, Erin's husband also works in the Southbelt English department. I described Erin in my journal writing, "she has a quirky sense of humor, loud voice, and an infectious laugh, Her kids adore her. They hang on to every word" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019). She seldom has discipline issues, and her students always seem anxious to please her. I noted, "these kids are her babies. She talks about them like a parent and wants the absolute best for each one" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019). She is truly proud of every moment and holds them to a high standard of academics and behavior. When discussing her strengths in the classroom, Erin said, "I guess I know they all can be successful, so I just hold on to that no matter what. My kids know that we're never going to stop working" (personal communication, April 12, 2019). Erin said that her "biggest challenge is letting go of control. I'm so regimented and obsessive about everything. Sometimes that works great, but I need to learn how to let go a little bit" (personal communication, April 12, 2019). For this coaching cycle Erin made her goal to "increase the complexity of student responses through structured questioning" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019). Erin "asked to co-plan the lesson and for me to video. She wants to take her own questioning data with the video" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019).

Frances. Frances came to Southbelt after a career as an intermediate teacher and instructional coach. I wrote in my journal "I've known Frances for a long time through work

with C&I. She is one of the best hires I have ever made. She was ready to get back to the classroom and has loved every minute" (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019. When discussing journey into teaching, Frances said "I grew up here and graduated from (sister SEISD high school). I've spent my whole life with this community. All my kids are in this district. I love it, and I want kids to be successful here" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). She feels that her biggest strength in the classroom is that "I can work with any kid. As long as you're in my room, you're going to learn. All these behavior issues or whatever- I don't care. You're going to learn" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). Her biggest challenge is "probably that I haven't done high school before, and I've been out of the classroom for a while. I get insecure about stuff and don't know if I'm always doing the right thing" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). When discussing her goal for the coaching cycle, Frances said "I know writing is where I need to focus because it is new for me. I want to make sure that every kid is participating in a writing activity. I've got some kids that just hide out and don't engage" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). To accomplish this goal, "Frances and I decided to have kids create a writing rubric in small groups. She wants to make sure that all kids are participating and contributing to the group" (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019).

Ginger. Ginger is a young teacher from the Southbelt community. She describes how she came into teaching saying "I was home schooled growing up, so I kind of had a different experience. I was teaching pre-school at my church and really loved it. I thought I would do elementary, but I love English. I thought it would be cool to teach my favorite subject" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Like Cora, she student taught at Southbelt and stayed. Ginger thinks her "biggest success in the classroom is relationships. I'm kind of weird, so I'm good with kids who are a little bit different" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Discussing

challenges, Ginger said “I am super unorganized- you know that already. I think that being unorganized sometimes affects me when I’m teaching because I lose track of where I am, who I’ve called on, and where I’m going. I’ve gotten better, but I still need to work on it” (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Ginger “asked for a questioning strategy. She wants to increase student non-volunteer responses while she introduces *The Hobbit*. She asked for video and data collection” (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019).

Hannah. Finally, Hannah has spent her fifteen year career at Southbelt. She “became a teacher to help kids. I’ve always loved kids, especially older ones. All this time later, I’m still here” (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Hannah feels that her “biggest success in the classroom is relationships. They drive me up the wall, but I really love being their teacher. I think they know that” (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Hannah’s biggest challenge is “how much the kids have changed over the years. I don’t always know how to deal with them. A few years ago, I could get kids in tutoring, call parents, all that. Now I can’t Everything has changed, and I’m just trying to make it” (personal communication, April 17, 2019). I wrote in my journal that “Hannah has had a hard year. I feel for her because things have changed so much. I really want to make sure she feels some success with this coaching cycle” (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). After a long discussion surrounding outside factors that impact the classroom, Hannah decided that her goal for this cycle was to “do a strategy where all kids participate, especially my (striving) kiddos. They are either super quiet or they avoid the work by getting off task” (personal communication, April 17, 2019). To accomplish this goal, Hannah asked “to watch (a partner teacher) do a lesson where all her kids participate. I told her about (the teacher’s) lesson, and she seemed interested. I tried to come model, but she wasn’t open to that and would rather watch (partner teacher)” (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019).

Proposed Research Paradigm

This study utilized qualitative research methods. The questions centered on the feelings of confidence that teachers experience during instructional coaching. According to Michael Quinn Patton, qualitative research seeks to explore "human meaning making" (Patton, 2015, p. 4). Beyond quantitative data and test scores, I sought to understand how teachers felt during the instructional coaching process. My goal was to understand their feelings throughout the study and to recognize the patterns that surrounded those feelings. Human experience is more complex than numbers can show. Numerical data will not be able to tell the entire story of a teacher's feelings (Torrance, 2018). With Patton's criteria of "openness of inquiry" during qualitative research in mind, my study utilized open-ended interview questions, openness to where the study leads, and looking for patterns while studying documents with an open mind (Patton, 2015, p. 11).

Data Collection Methods

Following Patton's actions and processes for data collection, I worked through each step of my potential research (Patton, 2015). Narratives and descriptions from the teachers helped to develop new conceptual categories. Systematic data collection allowed to construct theory on the impact of instructional coaching (Patton, 2015). Experiential in nature, the data tracked teachers' feelings throughout the coaching process and intended to be true to the teachers' experience, which is a central tenet of qualitative research (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2018). Although past research on instructional coaching exists, my hope was for this study to be able to think through the data in a different context, focusing on teacher voice and experience.

Semi-structured interviews. Because of the emphasis on encouraging teacher narrative, I utilized a variety of qualitative data collection methods in this study. Semi-structured interviews provided the foundation of the data collection and intended to keep the interviews on track in order to answer the research questions (Brinkmann, 2018). Based partially on *The Impact Cycle* (2018), I also supplemented the interview with my own questions about the teacher's experience with coaching. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to "serve the researchers goal of producing knowledge…" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 580). This method of data collection allowed the conversations to remain focused, while also providing space for the participant to expand beyond the interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were used before the instructional event in order to form a baseline of teachers' feelings before the coaching cycle (see Appendix A). After the instructional event, semi-structured interviews served to illustrate teachers' experiences in this coaching cycle (see Appendix B). The purpose of the closing interview was to gain a deeper understanding of how the teacher felt during the instructional coaching process. Interviews help the researcher to understand both what we may not directly observe and what we have actually observed as the researcher (Patton, 2015, p. 426). Additionally, interviewing allows the participant an opportunity to reflect on the experience. A semi-structured interview provided focus on the research questions and gave participants space to expand on answers.

Annotated lesson plans. Teachers completed annotated lesson plans during this study (see Appendix C). The Southbelt High School English department uses a designated lesson plan template. Participating teachers were asked to make notes on their lesson plans based on their experience during instruction. Teachers noted successes, challenges, further questions, and

suggestions for changes on the lesson plan. Analysis of these notes allowed for better understanding of teacher's feelings surrounding the instructional event.

Researcher journal. In addition, I kept a journal in order to reflect on the instructional coaching experience. After each pre-conference, instructional event, and post-conference, I wrote a brief summary and reflection. This helped me to keep track of my notes, observations, and questions as I worked with teachers during the instructional coaching process. The journal helped me to identify moves I made during coaching and how I responded to teachers in different ways. As literature suggests, reflection on the coaching journal remained key throughout this study (Costa & Garmston, 2016; Knight, 2013, 20189. The opportunity to reflect proved essential to understanding more about the complexity of the connection between my choices and the experience of the teacher. Instructional coaching is a relationship, and I, therefore, was not a neutral bystander. As much as teachers were the center of the research, so was I as the coach. A reflection journal also helped me to remain aware and purposeful of my own feelings throughout the process. With qualitative study, it is important to be cognizant of my own experience in order to better understand my biases, preconceptions, and reactions during the process (Patton, 2015; Torrance, 2018).

Data Analysis Strategy

Data analysis followed the process of qualitative coding using three steps. The first step was to read and look for first impressions of the data. The second step involved descriptive coding to summarize the larger portions of the data. The third step included coding for patterns. The purpose of the third step is to "find these repetitive patterns of action and consistencies" that appear in the data (Saldana, 2009, p. 5).

In the first cycle of coding, I attempted to develop a first impression of the data. I organized the pre-conference, post-conference, annotated lesson plans, and journal entries by teacher. I read each data point for each teacher to provide a general understanding of the data.

Next, I used elemental methods, specifically descriptive coding, which summarized the larger part of the data (Saldana, 2009, p. 4, 39). As with the first cycle, I coded the semi-structured interviews, annotated lesson plans, and journal entries by teacher. Descriptive coding utilized one word or short phrase to summarize or describe the segment of data and provided an initial overview. In addition, I coded using affective methods, specifically coding for emotions and values (Saldana, 2009). The nature of the research questions required an understanding of teachers' feelings in the classroom and with instructional coaching, making affective methods of coding an appropriate fit.

The third cycle of coding looked for patterns within the elemental and affective coding from the first cycle. Again, I coded both interviews, the annotated lesson plan, and my journal together. Saldana references Hatch's guidelines (2002) for analyzing codes for patterns, including looking for similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation (Saldana, 2009, p. 7). Based on the data collection tools, patterns most frequently arose in terms of teacher willingness to participate in creating goals with the instructional coach and the types of goals created. Hatch's guidelines were helpful when coding and categorizing data because of the multiple teachers participating and number of coaching cycles completed.

In this study, all data analysis and coding was done by hand. I chose to both take data by hand and to code by hand because I was attempting to re-create the coaching cycle as closely as I would at any other time with a teacher. We are in a partnership together and dependent on one

another when making meaning of our work. I felt that the qualitative data would benefit by hand coding. This allowed for an opportunity for me to interact with the data in an authentic way.

Timeline

The study took place over a period of four weeks. This timeline was chosen based on the guidelines of *Student-centered coaching at the secondary level*, which recommends a cycle of three to four weeks with the option of six weeks for teachers needing extended time (Sweeney, 2013, p. 11). Each teacher participated in one pre-conference interview, at least one instructional event, and one post-conference interview. For the purposes of this research, I studied one cycle. This included a pre-conference, instructional event, and post-conference. I started by asking for each teacher to schedule a pre-conference with me. During the pre-conference interview, I scheduled an additional time with them to participate in the instructional event. Most teachers chose to participate in the post-conference interview on the same day as the instructional event. If teachers were unable to do the post-conference on the same day, we scheduled as closely to the instructional event as possible.

Reliability and Validity Concerns

As the foundation of qualitative research is personal, it is inherently about understanding human behavior fully engaging with the research (Patton, 2015). One cannot be detached and still empathetic to the research participants with whom one is working because all research is subject to the researcher's point of view (Erickson, 2018). Patton describes the fine balance required in qualitative research because of its inherent complexity. Part of this complexity comes through the importance of emphatic neutrality, which Patton defines as an understanding a

person's situation and viewpoint without judgment, while also communicating in an authentic and respectful way (Patton, 2015, p. 57). To achieve emphatic neutrality in my own research, I needed to remain reflective throughout the research process and continually check in with my own emotions and reactions to the research subjects and events. Bias may be inevitable; however, purposeful reflection allowed me the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the research (Torrance, 2018).

Additionally, this study focused on teachers who I was already working with as an instructional coach. The context makes the outcome of the study unique because I have already developed relationships with each of these teachers. I am deeply invested with each of the participants and with the school as a whole, which likely changed how I collected and analyzed the data. Although I attempted to be purposeful in reflection and remaining aware of my personal feelings throughout the study, my own biases were undoubtedly still present. Personal bias and experience is inherently a part of a qualitative study, and this specialized context did influence the results of the study.

Closing Thoughts

The purpose of this study is to understand how instructional coaching affects teachers' level of comfort and sense of empowerment in working with older striving learners. To understand how teachers respond to instructional coaching and how coaching impacts their work with striving learners, I first established a protocol to make the coaching process consistent. I followed Jim Knight's *Impact Cycle* in the coaching process when working with the eight participating teachers. Semi-structured interviews, annotated lesson plans, and a reflection journal served as the data points in this research. Coding of the data attempted to provide

understanding of overarching themes from the study. The goal of analysis was to understand how teachers feel throughout the coaching process and why.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS/FINDINGS

Introduction

The following data was collected from pre-conference questions, annotated lesson plans, post-conference questions, and the researcher journal. After each interaction with teachers, I wrote a journal documenting the experience. I focused on the teacher's reactions during each event and the moves and changes I made based on those reactions. The journal proved especially insightful as it gave me the opportunity to reflect on my coaching moves with each teacher. Data from my journaling is included from each stage.

Presentation of Data by Research Question

Question 1: How does instructional coaching affect teachers' comfort levels in working with older re-testers?

Data from question one is presented by teacher below.

Ashley. In her fifteenth year at Southbelt, Ashley "splits her schedule between on-level and advanced courses and expressed that it was difficult to transition between classes while also planning for the needs of striving learners" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Ashley stated that "until a few years ago, it did not seem so hard to split classes. Now, there is just so much pressure with testing" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Between the demands of large class loads and varying instructional needs, she expressed that "it is just getting harder and harder to keep up with all the extra stuff going on. Compared to how I started (teaching), everything is totally different now. I have more students, more classes, and more people involved all the time now" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). She feels like "relationships with students are (her) biggest strengths" (personal communication, April 3, 2019).

During the pre-conference interview, Ashley talked about her experience with learners at all instructional levels and indicated that she tried to "take things slower when they don't get it. I find myself coming back to the same things a lot, so I try to make sure everyone is on the same page" before moving on (personal communication, April 3, 2019). When working with students who are re-testing, Ashley expressed how difficult it could be to make sure everyone received what they needed and were prepared for testing, saying, "it gets hard. There are twenty plus kids in the class, and they're all different. They need different tests, but they also need to graduate" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). She does not design her lessons with intervention in mind, but she noted that she does make changes in pacing when needed. Ashley states, "I just slow down. I don't move on until everyone is ready" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). As we made goals together, we emphasized a focus on purposeful strategies to provide real-time intervention as needed for students. I wrote, "I really want Ashley to move into intervention more than pacing. Slowing down can help, but it doesn't solve all the issues" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019).

Ashley chose to co-plan a lesson as her instructional event. Ashley teaches two sections of on-level seniors who are getting very close to graduation. I noted in my journal that "most of these students have been re-testing for a long time. Lots of low raw (STAAR) scores in this group" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Ashley indicated that many have behavioral issues outside of English class and deal with chronic absenteeism, stating, "It is kind of a toss up who is going to be here from day to day. They're pretty good in my class, but [senior assistant principal] calls or comes to my class about once a week to pick someone up for discipline from a different class or lunch or whatever" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). She expressed that her goal was to help students earn their English credit for graduation that would thereby give them

the opportunity to pursue higher education or certification programs in the future, saying "I just want them to be able to move forward with whatever they want to do. Whether that is (local community college) or getting a job, they need to graduate. I take that really seriously" (personal communication, April 3, 2019).

Ashley credited our time co-planning for the success of reaching striving learners' needs. When planning alone, Ashley stated, "it is hard to do all the things in your head, and sometimes you can't think of everything on your own" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). We were both able to take part of the workload and tailor the lesson to the needs of Ashley's students. Because of the varying instructional abilities in her class, Ashley is concerned that sometimes re-testing students can be "left behind," so she appreciated the time to be purposeful in working with them (personal communication, April 4, 2019). She did have positive feelings about how the lesson reached striving learners, but she did not think this was a permanent way to plan because of how much time it required, saying, "I liked it, but it took a long time. I don't think I can do this type of thing all the time" (personal communication, April 4, 2019).

Hannah. During the pre-conference, Hannah conveyed concerns that she needed to "slow down" her instruction "so much that I can't get to everything" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Hannah tended to come back to outside factors that may cause students to struggle, saying that "parents don't help, the discipline is out of hand, and I don't know what is going on at (intermediate feeder schools). It gets harder every year" (personal communication, April 17, 2019).

Hannah chose to "watch (a partner teacher) teach a lesson with a high level of engagement. She heard about the lesson during PLC" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). During pre-conference, she expressed that "it is really hard to get all students involved,

especially my (striving) babies" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). A partner teacher in her planning group, who teaches a similar student population, had tried a strategy that was interactive and gave every student a specific role. As we talked through goals, Hannah conveyed that "she did not want coaching in her classroom as she taught," and she "felt more comfortable watching a partner teacher than having me model for her class" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). Hannah's partner teacher provided the lesson plan in advance, so Hannah was prepared for the class. While she watched the lesson, Hannah annotated the partner teacher's plan. During our post-conference, Hannah expressed, "I enjoyed watching (her partner teacher), but I'm not sure this would work for my kids" (personal communication, April 19, 2019).

Cora. Cora expressed concern for her re-testing students during our pre-conference, saying that she "worr[ies] about them" and wanted to "emphasize student engagement during an observation" (personal communication, April 1, 2019). She especially wanted to "focus on helping (striving learners) to get into the book we're starting" (personal communication, April 2, 2019). During pre-conference, Cora said that "sometimes [striving learners] will open a book and just put it straight down. I want them to give it a try" (personal communication, April 2, 2019). She planned to engage all students in questioning and to read the book aloud as opposed to having students read independently. For our coaching cycle, Cora asked for me to take data on student engagement. I sketched a seating chart and noted as students participated or needed re-direction (Researcher Journal p. 2, April 3, 2019). I did not know which students were re-testing or any student's academic level as I watched the class. When asked about her comfort level with striving learners, Cora said, "I get concerned because I don't want them to not get what they need. I guess that is what makes me uncomfortable" (personal communication, April 3, 2019).

Ginger. During the pre-conference, Ginger described her work with re-testing students as "challenging but rewarding. You know I need constant support" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Ginger stated, ""I feel comfortable with whatever student I get, but I don't always know what to do for them" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). She "did not have negative feelings about the varying instructional levels of her students and credited her work with Special Education and (her co-teacher) with helping her to meet a wide range of student needs" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019).

Although "happy that students seemed excited about the lesson overall", Ginger was "concerned that (her striving students) were not engaged during the class" (personal communication, April 18, 2019). Based on the observation form, Ginger noticed that she "didn't keep going with the questioning strategy" that was originally planned (personal communication, April 18, 2019). This lesson did not "go exactly as planned" for her striving learners, but Ginger was "able to see what was actually going on when she lost track" of the questioning strategy (personal communication, April 18, 2019).

Frances. After an entire career in SEISD, this is France's first year in high school. She indicated in the pre-conference that she "feels comfortable with striving learners", but she "feels less comfortable with high school curriculum" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). In my pre-conference journal, I noted that "intermediate does not emphasize re-testers in the same way as high school," and Frances has found "meeting the needs of re-testing students while also covering on-level curriculum to be a new challenge." (Research Journal, April 15, 2019). While she does feel comfortable with striving learners, she remarked in the pre-conference that she "does not always know the [instructional] needs from high school re-testing" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). Because of her lack of comfort with high school curriculum,

she “chose co-planning as the first step of instructional coaching and then asked that I observe her teach the lesson and collect data” (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019).

Diane. Diane utilized our coaching time to be very purposeful about meeting the diverse instructional needs of her students. She expressed that “dealing with initial and re-testing is a different type of challenge, but I just try to stay focused on making progress from wherever they are” (personal communication, April 2, 2019). For this coaching cycle, Diane set the goal of “targeting needed intervention for her striving students while maintaining a high level of rigor in instruction” (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). As we discussed different strategies to meet all students’ needs during pre-conference, Diane kept coming back to encouraging her students to be “less dependent” on her (personal communication, April 2, 2019).

As we discussed the lesson during the post-conference, Diane was very “happy with how [her] students did when she re-directed them” back to their own resources (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Our instructional coaching cycle was beneficial because she found that “having a partner to jump in and problem solve with” is most helpful when “trying to reach every kids’ needs” (personal communication, April 4, 2019). In my post-conference journal, I wrote that although Diane “felt like I problem solved with her, she was already well on the way” to achieving her instructional goal and perhaps “just needed a partner to talk to” (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). She “needed little questioning or guidance when goal-setting and creating a plan to reach those goals” (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019).

Erin. During her five years in the classroom, Erin has had positive experiences in working with striving learners saying, “I’ve always taught sophomores during STAAR, so dealing with re-testing is just what I do. It can be hard, but I’m always thinking and looking for ways to do my best for them” (personal communication, April 12, 2019). Much like Diane, Erin

is extremely committed to the specific needs of striving learners. She stated that "videoing classes and seeing (the coach's) data are my favorite ways to work with you when I'm trying to see where all my [striving] learners are" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Erin felt that this lesson "did meet the needs of (her re-testing students)" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). When I asked why she thought that was the case, she stated, "I've just tried so many different things and seen myself on video so many times. Now this is kind of like second nature" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Specifically in terms of striving learners, she has found her "lesson planning and approach in the classroom is more purposeful since I've spent so much time setting goals for them" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). In the future, Erin expressed that "from the beginning of next year, (she) would like to work with (the coach) to analyze student work and use that as a starting point for coaching" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). I noted in my post-conference journal that Erin is "exciting to work with because she is always thinking of the next way to grow" (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019).

Beth. Beth is very conscientious about her classroom environment and wants all students to feel "happy when they're here but still challenged" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Enjoying her time with striving learners, Beth emphasized that working with them was "about more than academics," and she is "always trying to get them what they need" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Beth said that working with re-testing students was "tough" because she feared that "many students had not had positive experiences in English" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). As a regular participant in videoing and data collection, I wrote in my pre-conference journal that Beth is "very thoughtful in how instructional strategies are impacting her [striving] learners" (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). She also chose a "combination of co-planning, video, and data collection with a focus on student to student

interaction during small groups. She wants kids to work together and not depend on her" (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). Together we planned a "highly structured lesson with several scaffolds leading to a higher-level skill" (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). She asked for me to "take data on interactions in her class to gauge how many were student to teacher or student to student" (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019).

Although she felt that "the kids did well interacting with one another," some of her striving learners still tended to "remove themselves from the group" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). As we discussed the lesson, Beth expressed that she was "still working on finding a balance of letting students interact and work together while also holding everyone accountable" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). During the lesson, she indicated that she was "happy with how students were working together;" however, when we worked through the observation form and video later, she noticed that "many of (her striving learners) were not participating" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). I wrote in my post-conference journal how quickly "she focused in on an issue she would like to improve without any guidance or questioning from me" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019). Instead of guiding her to an area of improvement, I noted that I continued to "remind her of all the positive things that happened in the lesson" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019). When asked what was helpful for her work with striving learners during our cycle, she echoed many of the other teachers in that she appreciated having a "partner to talk to" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). I wrote in my post-conference journal that Beth "(held) herself to very high standards and needed encouragement about her work with striving learners more than anything else" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019).

Question 2: How does targeted instructional coaching in intervention strategies change teacher practice with older re-testers?

Data from question two is presented by teacher below.

Ashley.

For this coaching cycle, Ashley chose to focus on tracking student learning when working with partners or groups. Ashley wanted to "see where they all are on different skills with the article," (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Together we planned a lesson that involved a small group rotation working on a variety of skills surrounding an informational article (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). In Ashley's lesson, we planned a "small group station rotation using specific task cards" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). The instruction focused on reading and analyzing informational texts. After our pre-conference, I wrote that task cards meant to "provide structure to the stations and help students to engage with a specific skill in their small groups" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). This also allowed Ashley to run a teacher-led station for more intensive intervention. I noted in my journal that Ashley "was engaged throughout the planning process;" however, she was "concerned that some of her students may struggle through more of the independent work," and she did not want them to be frustrated (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). I noted in my journal after the pre-conference that perhaps much of her hesitancy in trying new things came through a desire to protect her students from not feeling successful. I wrote, "She is really sensitive to them not failing. Needs options to make it work" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Additionally, I noted that Ashley has mixed feelings about instructional coaching and could be "hit or miss when working with me" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). I wrote "while she enjoys having a partner to discuss lessons

with, she doesn't usually like me to come to class unless she wants to show off something working well for her" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019).

When the stations first began, Ashley noted that she was worried about students completing the task card, writing "done?" in the margin of the lesson plan (Ashley Annotated Lesson Plan, April 4, 2019). After the first rotation, however, Ashley felt that students seemed to "better understand what they needed to do" and worked more productively (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Ashley's "favorite part" of the lesson was the teacher-led station because she was able to provide intervention on a small scale instead of for the entire class and "get everyone what they need" (Ashley Annotated Lesson Plan, April 4, 2019).

On her annotated lesson plan, Ashley noted that the teacher station had been the most productive because she "was able to spend more individual time with students" (Ashley Annotated Lesson Plan, April 4, 2019). She worried about releasing the students to small groups, but she found that the task cards helped them to remain more focused. Ashley expressed, "I don't like having them in small groups, but the task cards did help keep them going," (personal communication, April 4, 2019). While she thought this lesson style was effective, she indicated with her annotations that she was concerned about recreating the groups with a different lesson becau se planning was time-intensive, writing "Too much time?" on the lesson plan (Ashley Annotated Lesson Plan, April 4, 2019).

Hannah.

On the annotated lesson plan, Hannah noted that she wanted to try the teacher's warm-up strategy by writing a star symbol next to it (Hannah Annotated Lesson Plan, April 19, 2019). The "warm-up was a grouping strategy that placed students of mixed instructional levels together" (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019). Hannah wrote that this strategy may "get all involved" and

help give students a chance to engage with the content (Hannah Annotated Lesson Plan, April 19, 2019). After students were grouped, the assignment required each student to respond to a prompt through writing, which made students dependent on each person in their group. Hannah questioned this by noting, “What if all don’t participate?” (Hannah Annotated Lesson Plan, April 19, 2019).

Hannah indicated that the biggest success of the lesson was how the students were grouped. She felt like the grouping strategy would help in her class because when her students choose their own groups, they tend to go with their friends, which could be chaotic and inefficient. Hannah conveyed that she “didn’t think that all of (her striving students) would participate in the lesson” (personal communication, April 19, 2019). When I asked why that was a concern, she thought that “my kids who struggle may not feel comfortable letting other people read their writing. This would be a lot for them” (personal communication, April 19, 2019). We continued to discuss ways to “make the lesson work for all of her students, and she agreed to try the strategy in her class” (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019).

Hannah felt “more comfortable trying a new strategy” with her striving students because she had seen a partner teacher work through the entire lesson, but she said that she was “not ready to have someone in her classroom” (personal communication, April 19, 2019). In my post-conference journal, I noted that “trying to encourage her to let me in her classroom seemed to make her shut down, so I stepped back and tried to keep the coaching relationship going instead of pushing my own coaching goals with her (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019). For future coaching sessions, we decided to co-plan to try this lesson in her class and to be purposeful with planning for re-testing students in the process.

Cora. On her annotated lesson plans, Cora noted that one section of reading was "too long" and wrote "change" (Annotated Lesson Plan, April 3, 2019. She said she felt like "most of the students had lost interest at that part" and that "maybe [she] didn't ask enough questions in that section" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). After looking at the observation form, Cora pointed to specific students that were in need of re-testing. She said, "I think it went pretty well, but I didn't realize [student name] was checked out by then" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). The class is large, and she expressed the difficulty of tracking students throughout the entire period.

During the post-conference, Cora felt like the class "went better than I expected because most were participating" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). She was "disappointed that many of her striving students did not participate in the class" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Cora expressed that she "tried to change up the delivery, but (she) still had students who gave up on the first page" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). We discussed strategies to increase participation from all of her students, and Cora brought up the need to "further break up the reading and change questioning to keep kids on their toes" as the lesson progressed (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Cora felt that the data helped her "see what was happening with (her striving students) because there are 25 kids in the class right before lunch, so it gets crazy" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). In my post-conference journal, I expressed pleasure that Cora "wanted another data collection paired with a video of the class so that she could watch her striving students more closely" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). This would be the first time her class has been videoed. When asked how our coaching cycle impacted her experience with her striving students, she felt that "just talking it out makes me more aware" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). From the pre-conference to the post-conference, Cora

"seemed to be thinking about the strategies she was using for her striving learners in a different way" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019).

Ginger. Ginger also chose a data collection for her instructional event. Throughout the year, Ginger has "worked on increasing participation with non-volunteer questioning and wants to keep working on this" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). Ginger tends to rely on volunteer responses and expressed in her pre-conference that she sometimes "misses out on checking in with everyone" during whole class instruction (personal communication, April 17, 2019). For this instructional event, Ginger had pre-planned the questions to introduce the first chapter of a novel. She drew a smiling face on her annotated lesson plan and indicated that she was happy that many students seemed "excited to read the book" after previewing the movie trailer (Annotated Lesson Plan, April 18, 2019). To increase non-volunteer responses with an emphasis on her striving learners, Ginger "used a class roster and checked off as she called on students" (personal communication, April 18, 2019).

During the post-conference Ginger noticed that "there were more non-volunteer responses in the beginning"; however, as the class went on, she relied more on global questioning and volunteer responses. As we discussed the observation form during the post-conference, she said that the "same few students were continuously answering questions," but her striving students seldom participated (personal communication, April 18, 2019). Based on the observation, she indicated that she wanted to "change the questioning strategy to involve more of her [striving] students" (personal communication, April 18, 2019).

I asked her how that data would impact her next lesson, and she responded that she would "like help trying a new strategy with (coach) observing the class again" (personal communication, April 18, 2019). I noted in my post-conference journal that I was "very

impressed with Ginger's progress" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). She "was disappointed by how the lesson went, but she was responsive when I re-directed her to the next step" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). Ginger was "able to let go of this lesson and make a plan for the next strategy to support her striving learners" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019).

Frances. I noted in my pre-conference journal that "Frances knew that she would like to work on writing skills from the beginning" of our pre-conference (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019). She expressed that she was "not as familiar with the writing (portion of the) STAAR exam" and would like extra help to meet the needs of her striving learners (personal communication, April 15, 2019). Frances expressed that "I don't want to leave anyone behind, but I want to make sure I'm on the right track with rigor" (personal communication, April 15, 2019). As we talked through how to achieve a high level of rigor while also ensuring that students received necessary support, we "decided on guiding her students through the creation of a rubric based on previous lessons" (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019). Frances requested that I observe her class and "take data by scripting teacher talk during the lesson" (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019).

With her annotations, Frances questioned the level of participation from all students and wrote, "partners?" to the side of her small group activity (Frances Annotated Lesson Plan, April 16, 2019). During her lesson, I scripted teacher talk at her request. Additionally on her annotated lesson plan, Frances commented that not every student participated in creating the rubric by writing, "Did everyone get it?" on the margin (Frances Annotated Lesson Plan, April 16, 2019). When students moved into small groups, she noticed that her striving students were not all contributing. She circled the group work on her lesson plan and indicated that she would change to having students "work in partners" for the next class (Frances Annotated Lesson Plan, April

16, 2019). During the post-conference, Frances felt that the biggest challenge was "getting everyone to participate in groups" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). She stated, "when I asked the small groups to add on to the rubric, I noticed that my kids who struggle didn't really add anything because they were waiting on the rest of their group" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Through the data collection, she saw that she was "not responding to many questions while students were working," but she still noticed that "some were not contributing" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). She commented that if her striving students did not "all feel comfortable participating or did not know what to do, then (she) would expect to be answering more questions" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Because of the scripted data, Frances remarked that she was able to "see that (her striving students) were not all participating" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Frances observed, "I knew that not all the kids were contributing to the rubric, but looking at this [scripted data] I see that I wasn't really redirecting them either" (personal communication, April 16, 2019).

Diane. Like Frances, Diane requested a combination of co-planning and observation with specific data collection. Diane has a "large population of re-testing students- lots of SIOP kids" (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). She expressed in pre-conference that "normally they have a lot of structure," so she wanted to try to help her striving students demonstrate "more independence" and self-direction (personal communication, April 2, 2019). We planned a lesson that involved students "applying three previously taught skills with (a new informational text) while working in small group stations," (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). For the observation, Diane was "interested in how she was responding to student questions" (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). During pre-conference, Diane stated that her goal was to "direct students to their resources and classmates to solve problems." Because "some [strivers] are constantly in need of

affirmation, I am trying to encourage them to be more confident. They know what to do" (personal communication, April 2, 2019).

I wrote in my pre-conference journal that I initially expected her to "focus on some sort of teacher intervention station." (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). Instead, Diane chose a different direction by choosing a small group activity covering three different skills and paired with necessary supports, and the "lesson achieved her goal" (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). I wrote in my post-conference journal that this was a "prime example of stepping back and letting the teacher guide the pre-conference" because "her idea for meeting her striving students' needs was so much stronger than my original thoughts " (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). I asked her about this in the post-conference, and she emphasized the importance of "having a partner to talk to when trying new things" (personal communication, April 2, 2019). She stated that without a partner, it was difficult to move forward when planning something entirely new, especially when targeting specific groups of learners.

Erin. Erin also chose a "combination of co-planning, observation, and video for her instructional coaching event: (Research Journal, April 12, 2019). Throughout the year, she has been working towards "high levels of questioning and responses from her students" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019). For this coaching cycle, she emphasized "meeting the needs of (her striving learners) when working on text analysis" (personal communication, April 12, 2019). When planning, I noted in my pre-conference journal that we chose a "more accessible text but used higher level analysis skills" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019). As I observed her class, "I also videoed to allow her to take her own data later. I scripted teacher questions, and she later scripted student responses to track the level of thinking" (Researcher Journal, April 15, 2019). On her lesson plan, Erin drew a happy face next to the most difficult skill of the class because

she felt that "students were successful" (Erin Annotated Lesson Plan, April 15, 2019). She found the lesson "helpful because [striving learners] didn't just shut off when the text seemed overwhelming" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). As we talked during the post-conference, Erin emphasized the importance of video and observation forms because she was "able to see the class" from different angles and put "special focus on how (her striving learners) were doing" (personal communication, April 16, 2019).

Beth. For this coaching cycle, Beth did feel that "some of her students were not participating to the level she would have liked" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019). During our post-conference, I asked Beth how the coaching cycle impacted the strategies she chose, and she expressed that she "knew exactly what the kids needed to do because we planned everything out" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2010). When watching the video and looking at the observation form, I noted in the post-conference journal that Beth felt that "she did not achieve a balance in encouraging students to be independent while also providing structure" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019). Because of the opportunity to watch her video and reflect, Beth felt like she was able to "pinpoint the issues and try something different for next time" (personal communication, April 9, 2019).

Question 3: How do teachers perceive their experience with instructional coaching throughout a coaching cycle?

Data from question three is presented by teacher below.

Ashley. While not always anxious to try new things that may not work the first time, Ashley did like the novelty of the lesson and had a positive response. I wrote that Ashley "usually doesn't like to put herself out there with new stuff. She seemed to do well with this one, though," (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). After the post-conference, I noted in my journal

that she “made [the] connection between the planning [we did together as part of the coaching cycle] and how her striving students participated in the class” (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). During the post-conference, Ashley said “I do think [planning] helped it all to work” (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Noting that all students were involved because of the detailed task cards, she was pleased with the level of engagement. She said, “the task cards gave them all something to do, so they all pretty much participated,” (personal communication, April 4, 2019). When asked about how instructional coaching impacted her instruction with the striving learners, she said that “it was good to try new things and really talk about that specific group of kids,” but she was also concerned with “the time that it took to create a lesson like this” (personal communication, April 4, 2019).

Ashley had a positive experience in this cycle, so I guided the questions to bring me into the classroom for our next coaching cycle and attempted to “let her take the lead. Be careful not to push her, or she won’t have me back” (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). During the post-conference, Ashley stated that “I think I’ve got it [the lesson]” (personal communication, April 4, 2019). She eventually agreed that I could “come into watch a similar lesson” to the one we had planned together (personal communication, April 4, 2019). In my post-conference journal, I noted that I kept repeating that it was “just a visit” and that I did not “want [her] to feel pressured” (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). I did not push her further with video or data collection forms because “my goal was to be invited into her classroom” (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019). We made a plan for an observation the following week.

Hannah. Hannah expressed that it had been a “tough year” and told me, “girl, I’m just trying to make it at this point” (personal communication, April 17, 2019). I wrote in my pre-conference journal that I “hate to see her struggle. I know she’s exhausted, so I want to support

her, but I need to help her move forward" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). I attempted to give the teacher "space to express her frustrations and concerns. At the same time, we have to think about what we can do in the classroom to get better" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). Hannah does not usually choose to engage in instructional coaching, but "she is open to planning together and planning with her teacher team" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). Hannah was feeling challenged by her classes at the time, describing the year as "crazy" and "super difficult" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). I wrote in my pre-conference journal that I did not "want to overwhelm her" because of the issues she was having in class (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019).

When asked about the instructional coaching experience, Hannah said that she appreciated the opportunity to "see another teacher" work through a lesson (personal communication, April 19, 2019). She also liked having the lesson plan while she watched the class because she "could tell what was going on" and was better able to follow the teacher's process (personal communication, April 19, 2019). Because we worked through a pre-conference together, Hannah "had an idea of how (the partner teacher) was going to engage with all different types of learners," including the re-testing students in the class (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019). Hannah conveyed that talking through the plan for these students was helpful because "I really have to make a plan for all of my kids" (personal communication, April 19, 2019). When we talked through how she usually planned for her re-testing students, Hannah said that she "[tried to] make one lesson work for everyone," so she thought working more differentiation into her class "may help with [my re-testing] students" (personal communication, April 19, 2019). I noted in my post-conference journal that I was "encouraged by the experience because watching

(her partner teacher) had helped Hannah to think more about providing differentiation for her striving students" (personal communication, April 19, 2019).

While I thought that "other avenues of instructional coaching may be better, she was interested in watching a partner teacher," so we worked to make a plan surrounding that observation (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). She can be "tentative about having me in her room," so I wrote in my pre-conference journal that I needed to "make her more comfortable" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). I saw her become "reluctant to have me model the lesson for her class", so we "changed gears and agreed to have her watch a partner teacher instead" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). The lesson was outside of her classroom and not with her own students, so she communicated in her post-conference that she "automatically didn't feel so much pressure" to try new things (personal communication, April 19, 2019). Based on the concerns she expressed about differentiation in the post-conference, "I asked if I could come in during a different class when she tried out a new strategy or if I could come teach in her class" (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019). I wrote in the post-conference journal that she was "hesitant to have me model or observe when she has not tried the strategy beforehand. In my post-conference journal, I noted that "we had not tried" this particular avenue of coaching before, and I needed to "suggest watching partners model lessons or to co-teach with a partner in the future" (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019). In terms of increasing comfort level, I wrote in the post-conference journal that Hannah "appreciated the opportunity to take the coaching cycle at her own pace" (Researcher Journal, April 19, 2019).

Cora. Cora is usually willing to participate in instructional coaching, but with two different class preparations, she is "concerned about time" (personal communication, April 2, 2019). In my pre-conference journal, I wrote that when I work with Cora, I try to "ensure that the

time is used efficiently so that she will want to continue with our coaching relationship" (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). Cora said during pre-conference that she "preferred observation to co-planning" (personal communication, April 2, 2019). In the post-conference, however, she was interested in "how specific students were engaging in class" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). She wanted to "co-plan different strategies and have me take data on her striving students' engagement" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Cora said "goal setting in the beginning is the best for me because I can think things through" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Cora felt that "being purposeful about what (she was) trying to accomplish was the most helpful" aspect of instructional coaching (personal communication, April 3, 2019).

Ginger. Ginger and I have "partnered together several times over the last two years. This year, Ginger has tended to like co-planning and working with other teachers" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). I suggested we plan something together, but I wrote in my post-conference journal that "she also wanted me to observe the class to collect data from the lesson that we planned" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). Ginger has "been through dozens of instructional coaching cycles with me over the past two years," and I noted in the post-conference journal that "she has a preference for how she likes to engage in coaching and what works best for her" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). In the past, "she preferred for me to come model lessons during first period and stay while she taught the lesson second period. Over the course of this year, she has moved towards observations and videoing" Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). During our post-conference, I asked her how her experience with coaching has changed over time, and she responded that, "we have a strong foundation of modeling, so now it is time to use those strategies and see how it goes" (personal communication, April 18, 2019). Ginger is "very serious about all of her students, especially her striving learners, and is always

looking for an opportunity to grow" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). I noted that "in the past, she could become discouraged if a class was challenging, but she was able to move on quickly when she was disappointed in how her lesson went" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019).

Frances. Additionally, I noted that Frances requested that we work on "developing structures to ensure that all students were able to participate" during our next coaching cycle (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). When we talked during the post-conference, Frances felt that "seeing [her questions and responses scripted out helped" her to see that her striving students needed more guidance, even if they were not asking her questions (personal communication, April 16, 2019). She stated, "when we looked at the observation form, it was obvious that I wasn't circulating enough and keeping everyone accountable" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). As Frances and I worked through the data collection I took during her class, she noticed that she "did not track her [striving] students'" learning closely enough throughout the lesson. I noted in my post-conference journal that in between the class I observed and her next class, "Frances looked at the script of her talking and remarked that she did not think the transition to small groups went well because her striving students were not all participating" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). She "immediately made a change and went to partner work for the next class" (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). During the post-conference, I asked her about this quick change. Frances said the "partners went much better because the kids really had to work together" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Frances emphasized the need for "everyone to participate" and have a voice in the process (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Frances "remained focused on her re-testing students throughout the lesson and made immediate changes when she felt that the script showed that she did not redirect these

students when they did not participate in their groups" (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). Based on this awareness, I noted in my post-conference journal that she "made a change for the next class by grouping students in partners and being more intentional in checking in" with them as they worked (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019).

Frances asked for further support in providing more structure to ensure her striving learners were involved. Following co-planning, Frances suggested that I observe another class and take data on student responses to see if her striving students "were more engaged and involved" in the lesson (personal communication, April 16, 2019). I suggested "videoing her class to allow us to script both teacher and student talk, but she was concerned about being recorded" (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). I noted in my post-conference journal to "keep recording in mind for next year" but not to push her for the remainder of this school year because she was already having a productive coaching experience (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019).

Diane. I noted in my pre-conference journal that Diane and I have been in a coaching relationship for five years, which puts us in a unique place when working together (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). I wrote that "the level of trust we have developed is unparalleled to any other teacher" because we have been together for so long. I also noted that Diane "will be the first one to give me honest feedback because she knows that I want to do my best just as she wants to do her best, too" (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). At this point in our coaching relationship, "I have not modeled in her classroom for a few years. I asked her why she thought the modeling had fallen away, and she said, 'don't you think I've seen it all by now?'" (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). I wrote in my pre-conference journal that "my first reaction was defensive, but I took time to think and reflect on what this really meant about our coaching relationship (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). Instead of backing away from coaching, I noted

that Diane and I "have managed to grow and shift our focus in how she prefers to engage in a cycle" (Researcher Journal, April 2, 2019). As she chose for this session, Diane tends to prefer observation or video because she "need[s] a mirror in the classroom" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Diane expressed that our partnership is key, and I noted in my journal that it has "taken time for us to get into the groove. Meeting [Diane] where she is in the moment has always made for the most effective cycles" (Researcher Journal, April 4, 2019).

Erin. Since the beginning of my time at Southbelt, Erin has "wanted to participate in instructional coaching whenever possible" (Researcher Journal, April 12, 2019). I asked her during the post-conference why she was interested in engaging from the beginning of our time together, and she responded, "I wanted to be the best for my kids, and, honestly, I was tired of being near the bottom of the data. You were a fresh start for me" (April 16, 2019). Erin is the "only teacher in the study or at Southbelt that chooses to watch her own lessons for data collection" (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). When she started with coaching, Erin stated that she "did not know what she wanted her goals to be," so we started small with co-planning and in-class models (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Eventually, "she moved into a preference for video observation" (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). She said that watching her own class "is powerful because I can see it all. I can choose where to focus and can watch as many times as I need" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). For this cycle, Erin wanted to take the strategies that she has been working on throughout the year and "put them all together" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). I wrote in the pre-conference journal that we were able to "plan together, scaffold the lesson, develop high level questions, and prepare questioning strategies together (personal communication, April 12, 2019). Erin "already had a plan for how she would like to approach her goals, and I mostly served as a sounding board" (Researcher

Journal, April 16, 2019). During the post-conference, Erin expressed that "the best part of coaching is making goals, seeing how it goes, and then we get to just keep moving to get better" (personal communication, April 12, 2019).

Beth. Prior to coming to Southbelt, Beth had never worked with a coach before; so, she admitted that she "started the year out nervous about coaching" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). I noted in my journal that I was "surprised to hear that because [Beth] always seemed so comfortable during the process" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). When I asked what changed to make the experience productive for her, she said, "the connection is everything. It makes all the difference." As we have moved forward in our coaching process, I noted in the post-conference journal that she has been more "willing to try new strategies" and to "experiment in her classroom" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). During this cycle, Beth tried a different approach with her striving learners, and she expressed that she "didn't know how it would go, but (I) was okay with that because we could work through it" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). Beth conveyed that each coaching cycle made her "feel more confident" even if the lesson did not go perfectly because she had the opportunity to grow (personal communication, April 9, 2019).

Results of Data by Research Question

Because I have had a previous relationship with all of these teachers, there was no resistance in participating in the study. All teachers are in a different place with their coaching journey, and each was willing to participate. With the exception of my detailed note-taking during the pre and post-conference interviews, all other aspects of the study were close to our normal coaching experience at Southbelt. For a new coach or when working with teachers new to

a school, the approach will likely be different. The key themes of access, purposefulness, engagement, partnership, choice, and relationships will remain the same; however, every teacher, coach, and school are different.

Question 1: How does instructional coaching affect teachers' comfort levels in working with older re-testers?

Data was analyzed from each step of data collection pertaining to the first research question: pre-conference, annotated lesson plans, post-conference, and the researcher journal. The data was first organized by research question, then coded thematically, and finally organized by theme. When coding the data, I attempted to understand how the teacher's response or my journal entry connected to the research question. Descriptive coding allowed me to focus on illustrating the specific moment with teachers. I then found similarities between the codes and grouped them. After grouping the codes, I labeled each group with an overarching theme. Following thematic organization, themes were analyzed for patterns based on Hatch's guidelines for analyzing thematic codes (Saldana, 2009).

Access. When discussing how they were working with older re-testers, a common goal for teachers was facilitating student access to learning throughout the lesson, demonstrating a thematic pattern of frequency and similarity with access. Codes in this theme included student access, teacher access, engagement, and student involvement. I grouped these codes together because all centered on how instructional coaching impacted access for both students and teachers. Within descriptive coding, I attempted to understand how teachers felt about working with striving learners during the coaching cycle. Upon further analysis, I understood that access

was possible through support. Teachers expressed a connection between providing access for students and the support offered through instructional coaching.

Ashley demonstrated concern for striving students' access to content, saying, "I don't want them to struggle. Sometimes my (striving) kids just don't even know where to start," (personal communication, April 3, 2019). For Ashley, deciding how to provide access to content was challenging; but, "working with you helped me in thinking about what to do for them" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). She expressed concern for striving learners at the beginning of the coaching cycle, but collaborating with a coach to focus on these specific students made her feel more comfortable. Coaching appeared to help teachers explore ways to provide students access to content, which then increased their comfort level with striving students.

Erin also connected access to coaching, which was originally coded as involvement, and providing effective access for students, stating, "it makes me feel better to see everything [as a result of coaching]" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Teachers appreciated the opportunity to be involved with the coach, but more importantly, that involvement facilitated further access for teachers when working with striving learners. Further analysis suggested a pattern that connects the goal of providing striving students access to content to the teacher's experience with the instructional coaching cycle. Teachers who created goals surrounding the themes of student access or engagement, like Frances, Ashley, and Ginger, tended to choose instructional coaching that would increase their awareness of striving learners within the classroom setting. Ashley was concerned that "there is a ton going on when everyone is on a different level" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Additionally, Frances expressed the connection between access to content and access to coaching, stating, "it helps to really talk

about that specific group of kids and get them what they need" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Ginger also found that coaching helped her to provide more access for her students because she "was paying extra close attention to them" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Perhaps because of the emphasis on providing access or engagement for their striving learners, teachers noted an increased awareness of how they were interacting with that particular group of students because of coaching. Teachers appreciated having access to the coach, which increased their comfort levels with striving learners. Then, teachers indicated a resulting benefit for their striving students.

Purposefulness. Data showed that teachers who wanted to be purposeful in providing more access for students through engagement or differentiation requested more support in instructional coaching to reach those goals. Analysis of themes presented a connection between purposefulness and access. Initial coding labeled this data as specific, purposeful, mindful, and support. Each of those codes indicated a larger theme of a purposeful approach for striving students. Additionally, teachers voiced the need for a purposeful approach in engaging with coaching to provide access to content for their striving students, reiterating the theme of engagement and the connection between engagement and purpose.

Erin emphasized the importance of a purposeful approach, describing her work with striving learners, saying, "I'm always thinking and looking for ways to do my best for them" (personal communication, April 12, 2019). Based on the interview data, for most of the participating teachers, having the opportunity to purposefully plan and reflect with a partner is one of the most effective way to increase comfort levels when working with older re-testers. Ashley reiterated the impact of the coaching partnership on her striving learners, saying "sometimes my (striving) kids can be left behind, so it helps to have someone to plan for them

with" (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Originally coded as mindful, Ashley indicated the necessity of ensuring striving students received necessary support. That code was eventually further categorized into the theme of purpose because her mindfulness in planning for her striving learners suggested a deeper purpose in how Ashley was engaging them in their learning. Ginger discussed the benefits of "paying extra close attention to (striving students) with our coaching" (personal communication, April 18, 2019). Ginger stated that, "I feel comfortable with whatever student I get, but I don't always know what to do for them." This quote indicates two codes upon initial coding- mindfulness in working with striving learners and her need for support. Ginger connected the support from instructional coaching to her ability to be mindful of her striving learners. Again, both mindfulness towards striving learners and the support from the instructional coaching partnership suggested a greater theme of purpose in engaging striving students.

In pre-conference, Hannah discussed that "it is really hard to get all students involved, especially my (striving) babies" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). While Hannah "enjoyed watching (her partner teacher)" through the coaching process, she indicated "I'm not sure this will work for my kids" (personal communication, April 19, 2019). Hannah appeared to see the connection between coaching and an effective strategy to utilize with striving learners; however, she did not indicate her desire to keep the process going.

Question 2: How does targeted instructional coaching in intervention strategies change teacher practice with older re-testers?

The second question asks how focused coaching in intervention strategies changes teacher practice with older re-testers. This step included analysis from each step of data

collection pertaining to the second research question: pre-conference, annotated lesson plans, post-conference, and the researcher journal. First, I organized teacher responses and my researcher journal as it pertained to the second research question, specifically focusing on instructional strategies utilized with striving learners. Then, I coded thematically, and finally organized by theme. I attempted to understand how the teacher's response or my journal entry connected to how instructional coaching affected the strategies chosen for striving learners. Similar to the first question, descriptive coding helped to express what happened when exploring strategies with striving learners. I then found similarities between the codes and grouped them. I then designated each group of codes with an overarching theme. Following thematic organization, I analyzed themes for patterns based on Hatch's guidelines for analyzing thematic codes (Saldana, 2009).

Engagement. The theme of engagement emerged as I focused on what served as the purpose of each strategy chosen by teachers during instructional coaching. When working with striving learners, teachers predominantly focused on engaging students and saw instructional coaching as a way to plan for increased engagement in classrooms. A pattern of similarity in the theme of engagement emerged as all eight teachers chose goals centered on engagement. Similar to the increased teacher comfort levels with older re-testing students during instructional coaching, participating teachers expressed that purposeful planning of strategies and the opportunity to reflect increased engagement in classrooms. Upon the first round of descriptive coding, participation, involvement, and engagement were frequent. Further analysis suggested that engaging striving learners was the central goal for teachers during the instructional coaching process. In my pre-conference journal, I wrote that using task cards in Ashley's class would "provide structure to the stations and help students to engage with a specific skill in their small

groups" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). I originally described this part of the journal as both participation and involvement because we planned a strategy to facilitate participation and involvement for all students, particularly striving learners. Ashley found this strategy to be beneficial because it allowed her to "get everyone what they need" and to "spend more individual time with students" (Ashley Annotated Lesson Plan, April 4, 2019). Similarly, Cora chose a goal to engage students in their learning and was "disappointed that many of her striving students did not participate in the class" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). I first described Cora's response as participation, but further categorization suggested that Cora's goal in this lesson was engaging students in their learning. Unlike Ashley, Cora did not feel like the strategy she utilized to engage students met the needs of striving learners, but the instructional coaching process was beneficial because she "seemed to be thinking about the strategies she was using for her striving learners in a different way" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Cora and Erin described similar goals for engaging striving learners, and Erin felt the strategy chosen through instructional coaching was "helpful because [striving learners] didn't just shut off when the text seemed overwhelming" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Ginger also hoped to engage striving learners using a specific strategy, but was concerned about the delivery of the strategy in the classroom. Although Ginger did not feel that all of her students engaged in the lesson, she was "able to let go of this lesson and make a plan for the next strategy to support her striving learners" (Researcher Journal, April 18, 2019). Ginger valued engagement for her striving learners, and she utilized instructional coaching to keep working on that goal. Frances also felt that her students did not all engage with the lesson, describing her biggest challenge as "getting everyone to participate in groups" (April 16, 2019). Like Ginger, Frances relied on the instructional coaching process to make a change with the organization of the chosen strategy and

made a change. During the instructional coaching cycle, Beth also close a strategy to engage all students but felt that "some of her students were not participating to the level she would have liked" (Researcher Journal, April 9, 2019). Again, students were not engaged to the level that Beth hoped, but instructional coaching benefited her in moving forward to help striving students better engage in future lessons.

Hannah also hoped to engage striving students in their learning, describing her partner teacher's instructional strategy as potentially "get(ting) all involved in the lesson" (Hannah, Annotated Lesson Plan, April 19, 2019). I coded this part of the lesson plan as involvement and engagement. The specific grouping strategy utilized by her partner teacher could potentially benefit striving students; however, Hannah remained reluctant about how her students would do if she tried the grouping strategy. Working through the instructional coaching cycle, which facilitated the opportunity to watch a partner teacher, made Hannah feel "more comfortable trying a new strategy" (personal communication, April 19, 2019). Like Ashley, Hannah's data indicated that engagement was key throughout the process. Hannah may not have automatically committed to the next phase of instructional coaching; however, the process indicated that planning strategies around engagement for striving learners remained a central goal.

Diane chose a similar strategy to Frances and Ashley in planning to engage striving students; however, Diane hoped to use small groups to engage students with one another during their learning. In this lesson, Diane sought to "direct students to their resources and classmates to solve problems" (personal communication, April 2, 2019). I initially described this goal as involvement and further categorized this to engagement. In using a strategy to involve students in small groups to solve problems, Diane hoped to engage striving students in their own learning

without depending on her. Teachers chose variations of similar strategies surrounding small groups and questioning, but each hoped to engage striving learners in the classroom.

Partnership. Connection between the themes of partnership and engagement also emerged when analyzing data categorized under question two. Data indicated that the partnership between coach and teacher helped teachers when achieving their goals surrounding engagement. The instructional coaching partnership specifically helped teachers to focus on their striving learners throughout the coaching cycle, even when the lesson did not reach the teacher's goal. Ashley does not usually engage in instructional coaching, but during this cycle, we created a new strategy to meet the needs of her striving learners. Ashley explained "I don't like having them in small groups, but the task cards did help keep them going," (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Through the coaching partnership, Ashley was willing to try new strategies with her striving learners. Ginger had a less positive view of her class, saying, "that is not what I wanted [when looking at engagement data],"(personal communication, April 18, 2019). Beth expressed similar concerns during reflection, saying, "I'm not happy at all with how they did. I need to figure something else out. I have to pinpoint the issues and try something different for next time" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). Even when the strategy did not achieve the teacher's goals for striving learners, most appeared to gain a level of perspective as they considered their striving learners and were then able to reflect with a partner on improving the future learning experience. Beth expressed the new perspective from work with the instructional coach by stating, "I didn't realize [student name] was checked out by then." Descriptive coding labeled this statement as perspective; however, the partnership between coach and teacher facilitated better perspective of the particular lesson. Similarly, Cora demonstrated the importance of a partner in helping to provide perspective, saying, "this class is crazy. It is hard to see where they

all are." Causation between the themes of coaching and perspective was also evident in Ginger's coaching cycle as she reflected "that is not what I wanted [when looking at engagement data]." The theme of perspective resulted from the opportunity to reflect through coaching. Although teacher was not entirely satisfied with the lesson, each teacher indicated that the cycle did not end with that individual lesson, which led to an additional descriptive code of improvement. The partnership between coach and teacher, even when the lesson did not go as planned, proved valuable when providing strategies for striving learners. Again, a pattern of correlation linking all thematic codes to improvement was evident. Considering strategies for striving learners, the teachers and I were able to work together and make changes for the future based on the successes and challenges from that lesson. The theme of partnership through our post-conference was clear as teachers continued to work towards their goals for engaging striving learners. Erin felt that "[my approach with striving learners is] more purposeful since I've spent so much time setting goals for them" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Partnership with a coach appears to have allowed teachers to gain perspective on the striving learners and then allows teachers to respond with instructional strategies that will meet their needs.

Question 3: How do teachers perceive their experience with instructional coaching throughout a coaching cycle?

The third question surrounds teachers' experiences with instructional coaching as a whole. This step included analysis from each step of data collection pertaining to the third research question: pre-conference, annotated lesson plans, post-conference, and the researcher journal. First, I organized teacher responses and my researcher journal by the third question, specifically noting teachers' experiences with instructional coaching. Then, I coded thematically, and finally

organized by theme. I attempted to understand how the teacher's response or my journal entry connected to the experience of instructional coaching. Descriptive coding helped to express what happened when exploring strategies with striving learners. I then found similarities between the codes and grouped them. I then labeled each group of codes with a predominant theme. Following thematic organization, I analyzed themes for patterns based on Hatch's guidelines for analyzing thematic codes (Saldana, 2009).

Comfort and Choice. In analyzing the data, a pattern of causation between the themes of comfort and choice, originally coded as both choice and preference, developed. I realized that choice and preference represented similar themes as I re-coded the data. As teachers exercised more choice, their comfort level with coaching increased. When Hannah was able to choose her coaching route, she "automatically didn't feel so much pressure," indicating a causation between the themes of choice and comfort (personal communication, April 19, 2019). I also noted the importance of choice in leading to increased teacher comfort in my researcher journal during Hannah's pre-conference, writing that I "tried to model first- definitely a no" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). I also noticed with Ashley that "she likes what she likes- let her take the lead," further demonstrating the importance of choice to teacher comfort levels (personal communication, April 3, 2019). The importance of choice in helping to increase comfort level with coaching was key throughout the process with each teacher.

Analysis of data emphasized the connection between comfort and choice as a causation pattern emerged between teachers' experiences with instructional coaching and the methods of coaching they chose. Ashley was more hesitant to participate saying "I don't think I need as much as other teachers" (personal communication, April 3, 2019). Without choice in how to engage with instructional coaching, a teacher may shut down more easily. Hannah demonstrated

a similar discomfort with coaching, and I noted "don't push [Hannah], or she'll shut down" (Researcher Journal, April 17, 2019). Both of these teachers chose routes that were less involved, and that choice led to an increase in comfort level. Teachers who were more entrenched in coaching, Beth, Cora, Diane, Erin, Frances, and Ginger, chose more intensive methods, including multi-stepped coaching. Participating in a classroom observation or video can potentially make people feel vulnerable, and teachers in this study who have previously participated in coaching chose these routes to achieve their goals. Erin explained why she chose videoing by saying, "[Watching video] is powerful because I can see it all. I can choose where to focus and can watch as many times as I need" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Erin chose video as an effective route during instructional coaching, and that choice was within her comfort level. Perhaps if I had pushed videoing on Erin, her experience in the coaching process would have been less positive. Ginger echoed the importance of choice, stating, "we have a strong foundation of modeling, so now it is time to use those strategies and see how it goes" (personal communication, April 18, 2019). Again, choice was a recurring theme as teachers chose these paths without pressure from the coach. That choice perhaps led to more comfort with instructional coaching. When I tried to push my own choice, teachers became less comfortable and "shut down" or became "hesitant" (Researcher Journal, April 3, 2019). Furthermore, a pattern of frequency and similarity developed with the theme of choice. Each of the eight participating teachers valued the space for teachers to choose their own coaching path.

Relationships. Data suggested a connection between the relationship between coach and teacher and the continued engagement in instructional coaching also developed upon analysis of thematic codes.

When coding descriptively, the codes trust and relationship were predominant. In terms of how teachers perceive the instructional coaching experience, trust was a foundation to the relationship in this study. I therefore categorized trust with relationships. Data suggests that the more teachers found their relationship to be rooted in mutual trust, the more willing they were to continue in coaching. Beth emphasized "the connection (between teacher and coach) is everything. It makes all the difference" (personal communication, April 9, 2019). Erin described her relationship with the coach by saying, "you [coach] were a fresh start for me" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Additionally, Ginger discussed the importance of "a strong foundation" in the relationship between coach and teacher (personal communication, April 18, 2019). It appears that trust is central in continuing to engage teachers in the coaching relationship. Without trust, teachers may be less willing to continue in the coaching relationship. Erin also indicated the importance of the relationship with the coach, saying "I was tired of being near the bottom of the data. You were a fresh start for me" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). Cora noted "I can think things through" when participating in instructional coaching (April 3, 2019). Teachers appeared to perceive coaching in a positive way when given the opportunity to engage in a trusting relationship with the coach.

Relationships build over time and perhaps lead to a more productive coaching experience. The data showed that continued commitment to the coaching relationship may lead to a better coaching experience. Erin is anxious to continue the coaching relationship and indicated that this process been productive for and she wanted to continue, "I want to just keep moving [with my goals]" (personal communication, April 16, 2019). In addition, data suggests that a strong relationship between coach and teacher helps teachers to continue participation in coaching as demonstrated by Diane and Beth. Diane noted the positive impact of the

instructional coaching relationship stating “you have to have someone else to work with,” (personal communication, April 4, 2019). Beth also indicated the benefits of a strong relationship with the coach, stating “I was okay with that because we could work through it” (personal communication, April 9, 2019). When the teacher did not agree with a suggestion, I found ways to keep the relationship going so that coaching did not end. I wrote in my post-conference researcher journals with Frances to “remember to try again next year. No need to push now” (Researcher Journal, April 16, 2019). Maintaining the relationship was essential. Data suggests that relationships are a key foundation to instructional coaching. The connection between relationships and instructional coaching suggest that one coaching cycle should not be the coach’s goal. Instead, participating in a continued relationship with the teacher will lead to positive outcomes.

Interaction between the Research and the Context

When collecting and then analyzing the data, each question came back to the importance of relationships- whether between teachers and students, striving students and instruction, or teachers and coaches. Each participating teacher chose similar goals for their striving students even if their journeys with coaching were different. Most importantly, the data showed that relationships can never be undervalued. The data suggested that being purposeful in engaging teachers by providing choice and building trust is essential if teachers are going to utilize instructional coaching in improving academic outcomes for striving learners. Specific reading or writing strategies and skills were not at the forefront of this data; but instead, empowering students and teachers through instructional coaching remained central throughout. In a time

when schools monitor continuous data points, each teacher expressed that having a committed partner to work with and talk to was the most impactful part of coaching.

Based on the study, I have developed a presentation for the SEISD Curriculum and Instruction department (see Appendix D for an outline of the presentation). The presentation discusses the research questions, data gathered, and analysis of themes. While I initially expected to develop a training manual for instructional coaches, my recommendation to Curriculum and Instruction is to develop a partnership protocol for coaches. Partners could work at the same grade level or work across grade levels. Coaches have the expectation to adhere to Knight's partnership principles- both to practice how to engage with teachers and to maximize the potential benefits with coaching partners (Knight 2007, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018). Coaches will partner with one another in a similar way that they partner with teachers. This process provides both practice for coaches in engaging in partnership and embedded professional development in helping teachers to grow as partners.

To begin the presentation, I will discuss how I developed the research questions and why I consider this study essential. This research centered on how instructional coaches were impacting teachers when working with striving learners and how teachers experienced instructional coaching on the whole. With SEISD's investment in coaches, it is important to understand the potential impact they have in the classroom. Next, I will summarize major literature surrounding the research questions, particularly the research surrounding Jim Knight's instructional coaching protocol (Knight, 2018). While Knight's protocol is predominant in our district, there has not been recent training on the foundations of his work. I will particularly focus on the partnership principles because of their underlying importance throughout this study (Knight 2007, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018). Then, I will explain the context of the study and give a

brief background of the participating teachers. This study involved a limited amount of participants with one coach on one campus; however, I will suggest in the presentation that lessons learned from this research could potentially benefit all coaches in SEISD.

I will summarize the data by research question and explain the development of thematic patterns based on that data. Relationships provided the overarching theme of this study. This discussion will explain the foundation for the benefits of providing avenues in building coaching relationships. Those relationships are not just build on campuses between coach and teacher. Coaches need the opportunity to reflect and partner with colleagues when developing that skill beyond isolated trainings. I therefore make two major recommendations to Curriculum and Instruction: coaching partner check-ins and a required coaching journal throughout the school year (see Appendices E and F). The purpose of both of these proposals is to maximize the impact of coaching relationships with teachers. Both the coaching journal and a protocol for partnerships conversations are included in the presentation. This study suggests that teachers who are engaged in instructional coaching experience a positive impact in working with their striving learners. Relationships are the foundation of instructional coaching. Therefore, a major goal for SEISD's instructional coaches should be to build strong and lasting relationships with teachers. Coaches will need support in this process. By providing a partner for coaches, they will have the opportunity to reflect on their coaching cycles with a colleague. The journal and partnership templates are easily followed and completed; however, the process of both activities help coaches to reflect and grow.

Partners will require every instructional coach to engage with a fellow coach for the purpose of check-ins and reflection. Continued training in Jim Knight's *Impact Cycle* remains important, especially for new coaches, but this study shows that it is time to go beyond

foundational coaching training and committing to the next level of work (Knight, 2018). I posit that coaches are missing the opportunity to move their practice forward because of the lack of time for growth. The goal of SEISD is to encourage coaches to be partnering with teachers in the classrooms and fellow coaches will help with that process. To do this, coaches need to develop a long term coaching relationship with teachers (Marzano, 2017). Data suggests that these relationships will not happen through isolation or luck. Coaches need the opportunity to reflect on their own practice with a focus on continuous engagement with teachers.

Currently, SEISD requires coaches to keep a log of how their time is spent. I propose that the amount of time spent on different activities is not as important as the quality of that time. Just as we are asking teachers to maximize instruction and be reflective in the process, instructional coaches should have the same expectation. I recommend that the Curriculum and Instruction department re-think how we are interacting with coaches. The district still emphasizes how coaches are spending their time, but instead of filling out a log that requires no thought or reflection, journals could potentially both track coaches' time and provide the opportunity for growth. My experience with this study helped me to focus on what steps most helped to move the coaching relationship forward. Logs do not adequately track those relationships. At the beginning of this study, I already had existing relationships with teachers. These took time to develop, and coaching without a trusting relationship will likely not be as effective. It is clear that coaches first need to concentrate on building lasting coaching relationships, but these relationships will not happen magically. Coaches instead need the opportunity to grow purposeful relationships with teachers. Checking in with a partner will hopefully encourage coaches to keep engaging with teachers in coaching cycles. Journals can serve as a foundation for the partnership conversations and facilitate reflection and growth based on coaching cycles. I

recommend that journals first include a summary of the coaching experience, similar to the researcher journal for this study. In my experience with this study, writing a brief summary after my interactions with teachers helped me to break down the experience and look back at the conversation for important details. Over time, I posit that these journals will also help coaches to understand patterns as coaching relationships continue. Coaches need training on how to interpret the coaching journal. During trainings throughout the year, coaches will practice interpreting a variety of journals. They will then work together to analyze the journals and plan future steps as if they were the journaling coach. To begin, coaches need guidelines in how to interpret patterns, specifically identifying similarities and differences between coaching cycles. After large group practice with journal examples, coaches will then work with their partners to practice with another example. All of this will take place during training, so coaches will have support from the trainer throughout the process.

In the process of journaling, looking for patterns should include similar or different experiences between teachers or similarities or differences between coaching cycles with the same teachers. In these journals, coaches should also pay close attention to their responses to teachers' experiences. Again, patterns will develop over time. Coaches should focus on similarities and differences between teacher responses. Then, coaches will be able to better track how teachers engage in instructional coaching over the course of multiple cycles. Upon analysis of journal entries, coaches can focus on the most beneficial ways to engage specific teachers by asking what worked or did not throughout the coaching cycle. The journal will allow coaches to reflect on what works for different teachers and how teachers are growing through the coaching process. These journals are essential throughout the school year, which will also lead to

increased professional development for coaches. The journals essentially act as a cornerstone for developing coaches in building relationships with teachers through instructional coaching.

As the department in charge of training and evaluating the instructional coaches in our district, Curriculum and Instruction needs to provide structure in growing coaches beyond isolated trainings. English teachers were the target of this study; however, the lessons learned could demonstrate benefits across grade levels and contents. The major components of the research surrounded the relationship between coach and teacher, which is applicable across contents and ages. Although English teachers were the focus here, relationships are essential for all instructional coaches and teachers. This study suggests that instructional coaching has the potential to significantly impact students and teachers in our district. The district has already invested significantly in coaches, but there is little training or support for how to facilitate coaching impact coaches. I suggest in this presentation that providing a coaching partner and requiring reflective journal will benefit our instructional coaches. Professionals should always have the opportunity for growth, and coaches should be no different. When coaching becomes more effective, teacher practice also has the potential for growth. That growth could then lead to increased student learning outcomes.

Summary

Throughout each teacher's coaching journey, the data continued to put relationships at the forefront. The relationship between teacher and coach then helped facilitate purposeful practice for striving learners as teachers focused on improvement, growth, and engagement. When considering how to utilize this data in the context of SEISD, it became clear that coaches need specific training and support in engaging teachers in long term coaching relationships.

Beyond what instructional strategies or data analysis skills coaches have to offer, this research suggests that the relationship outweighs all other aspects of an instructional coach's work.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings From Chapter Four

Relationships developed through partnership between teachers and coaches were central to this study. The primary benefit of instructional coaching was its connection to improvement. Teachers expressed that the coaching relationship helped them to provide access to content for their striving students. Teachers indicated that the coaching partnership provided them with purpose when planning for their striving learners. Because of the opportunity to reflect with the coach, English teachers in this study felt more comfortable in working with their striving learners. Each thematic code related back to partnership.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Extant Literature

Participating Southbelt teachers all chose an engagement strategy in order to meet the needs of their striving learners, which aligned with Baugh's emphasis on looking beyond academic skills and focusing on how these students are approaching learning (Baugh, 2017). Six teachers chose strategies surrounding small groups in order to engage striving students with their learning. The other two teachers chose questioning strategies to ensure striving learners remained engaged throughout the lesson. Teachers wanted their striving students to have a role in their learning. Reading and writing skills were not the emphasis for any of these teachers when creating coaching goals. Instead, each teacher hoped to involve this group of students in their own learning experiences. This supports the contention that literacy instruction centers on student engagement and empowerment (Cunningham & Allington, 2016; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Horn & Staker, 2015; Knight, 2016). The data suggests that these

Southbelt teachers inherently know that intervention goes far beyond concepts and skills; and in addition, they see that student involvement is essential when working with striving learners. Aligning with the literature, Southbelt teachers expressed that literacy is the foundation of learning and emphasized the importance of giving students access in learning (Anderson & LaRocca, 2017; Cunningham & Allington, 2016; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Horn & Staker, 2015. In this study, we explored specific instructional strategies for implementation based on teachers' goals. Outside of instructional strategies, other ways to engage students exist; however, this study focused on the impact of strategies when meeting the needs of striving learners. Teachers appeared to see engagement as the central goal of literacy, and that was goal reflected in instruction (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). All teachers wanted to structure their classes in a way that provided engagement for striving learners. Being purposeful in planning for engagement, then, was at the forefront of teachers' goals throughout the study. Working with a coach facilitated that planning process.

Data from this study supports literature emphasizing the importance of teacher reflection during instructional coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2016; Key et al., 2010; Knight, 2013; Wang, 2017). Several teachers in the study pointed out the benefits of simply having someone to talk to about their instruction. With the complexities of teaching, teachers appreciated a partner with whom to problem solve. Additionally, teachers highlighted their need for time and space in goal-setting, implementing strategies, and reflection (Costa & Garmston, 2016; Key et al., 2010; Wang, 2017). Relationships remained at the forefront of the instructional coaching experience. The study affirmed Knight's emphasis on the partnership principles by teachers frequently indicating the importance of choice, respect, equality, and relationships throughout instructional coaching (Knight, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2018). Instructional coaching proved to be primarily

dependent on maintaining strong partnerships. Much as Knight suggests, attempting to take choice away from teachers shows a lack of commitment to the partnership principles and, therefore, has a negative impact on the instructional coaching relationship (Knight, 2018). Southbelt teachers appreciated having a partner in their work and saw the positive impact of partnership when considering their comfort level when working when working with their striving learners.

The data collected in this study also demonstrated the need for individualized coaching approaches as encouraged by the literature (Costa & Garmston, 2016; Key et al., 2010; Knight 2009, 2013, 2018; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Each time I attempted to push teachers towards my own coaching preferences, I encountered resistance. Individualizing the coaching approach allowed the coach to place power back in the hands of the teacher. Coaching became less effective when I attempted to take that power into my own hands. As supported by literature, teacher choice was essential throughout the study (Aguilar, 2013; Key et al. 2010; Knight, 2009, 2013, 2018). I tend to most value in-class instructional coaching methods; however, the most important part of the coaching process was keeping the relationship going. That requires a personalized approach as not all teachers will need or want the same support. Additionally, the teachers who were most involved in the coaching process were open to creating additional goals at the end of the post-conference, demonstrating a commitment to continuous growth as emphasized by Costa and Garmston (2016).

Central to every conversation in this study was the importance of trust and connection in the coaching relationship. For Southbelt teachers, a trusting partnership was key when participating in instructional coaching. Engaging in one coaching cycle was beneficial, but the study suggests that a long term coaching relationship should be the overall goal. To engage

teachers in continuous coaching, a strong relationship will be required (Aguilar, 2013; Key et al., 2010; Knight, 2018). When I adhered to Knight's partnership principles, data shows teachers more willing to engage. Additionally, the partnership principles perhaps allowed me to continue the coaching relationship with teachers because I honored their choices. When I strayed from the partnership principles, teachers backed away from the coaching relationship. Moving away from the partnership principles broke trust with teachers and was therefore detrimental to continuing the relationship. Teachers in the study expressed that more engagement in coaching led to an increased comfort level with their striving learners; therefore, keeping the coaching relationship going should remain a central goal for the coach. Striving learners and their teachers will potentially experience benefits from the continuation of the coaching relationship. The connection between coach and teacher is the foundation for growth and improvement throughout the process (Knight, 2013).

Discussion of Personal Lessons Learned

The opportunity for data collection and reflection on this snapshot of my work in instructional coaching has been incredibly powerful. Many of my understandings about our teachers were reinforced throughout the study, especially their commitment to growth for the sake of their students. The study highlighted the commitment of Southbelt teachers to their students, even under the difficult cloud of testing. Parts of the process also surprised me, such as the realization that my interactions with different teachers centered on my preconceived notions or experiences with them. This study required me to slow down and be purposeful in how I was engaging in coaching. Being able to work with teachers in this way helped me to look at my professional practice and the teachers I work with in a new way.

I realized that a significant area for growth in my coaching is reflection. While I was continuously asking teachers to reflect on their practice, I was not doing the same with my own. What started as a data collection point with journaling is now a part of my everyday practice as a coach. Journaling helped me to stay aware throughout the cycle, and I think it will likely improve my practice in the future. By journaling, I was able to hold myself accountable in acting as a partner to teachers, not as the controller. This took constant reflection as I so often fall into old habits of giving advice instead of allowing the teacher to dictate her coaching journey. At times, I found myself unintentionally giving advice or controlling the situation. The journaling process was incredibly beneficial for me as the coach because of the opportunity to be purposeful.

Furthermore, the balance in the relationship between coach and teacher became evident. I was working under the assumption that I was always putting teachers and their needs at the forefront of the coaching relationship; however, I realized that my preferences often crept into conversations. Again, reflection on my own practice could hold a significant role in helping me to understand my thoughts and feelings. I would also like the opportunity to work with other coaches or my coaching mentor to analyze and evaluate my journal. The study showed me that I do not have enough interaction with others doing similar work, which weakens my practice. I am working too much in isolation and need the opportunity to partner with colleagues in order to grow. Even the simple act of keeping a reflective journal was significant, so I posit that having a colleague or partner to reflect with would have an even larger impact. Journaling was a manageable and effective way to improve my practice as a coach.

Implications for Practice

This study suggests that how coaches engage with teachers should be at the forefront of training. Emphasis on the relationship should be central when considering how to best train instructional coaches and develop a coaching protocol. Although facilitating planning groups, analyzing data, observing classes, modeling, and providing feedback are important, none of these coaching avenues will be truly purposeful without first establishing a strong relationship. This will signal a change from how instructional coaches worked in the past in SEISD. While these other tasks do benefit teachers, they cannot be at the forefront of the instructional coach's role. Shifting relationships and in-class coaching to the center of the coach's time will significantly influence how coaches work in this district. This shift could then lead to academic gains for students. Coaches need time and training as their roles change. The combination of a coaching journal, partner, and continued support through training will contribute to the professional development of coaches.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that without a strong relationship built on trust, teachers will be less likely to continue engaging in coaching. Not to be confused with a purely personal relationship or a lightening teachers' workloads, this study instead conveys that adhering to Knight's partnership principles, or a close equivalent as offered by other coaching protocols, should lay the foundation for all instructional coaching. It may be tempting to seek out immediate academic growth, but instructional coaching is a journey that goes well beyond one coaching cycle. Instructional coaching is not a quick fix to testing issues, but it does have the potential to facilitate significant changes for teachers and students.

To help coaches engage in long term relationships, ongoing support and training will be necessary. Professional development for coaches is necessary throughout the year. Instead of

relying solely on large group training sessions, partnership and journaling will serve as the primary mode of professional development. This models closely to how teachers engage in instructional coaching. Large group training sessions will then serve as an opportunity to build on the work done with journaling and coaching partners.

This study suggests that partners for the coaches could be beneficial. Data showed that keeping teachers engaged in a coaching relationship at whatever level was perhaps more important than individual coaching cycles. Keeping teachers involved is key. They need the opportunity to keep moving forward with the coaching relationship. That involvement will differ by teacher; however, coaches will need training on how to keep all teachers engaged. With a continuous relationship, teachers are able to set long-term goals, potentially leading to lasting academic growth for students. Coaches need a partner to reflect on their practice throughout the process. We see the benefits of teachers partnering with coaches; therefore, a partnership between coaches could also potentially demonstrate benefits.

Recommendations

In South East ISD, the current training schedule for instructional coaches involves six trainings that are held throughout the year. Neither new nor experienced coaches have a training before starting in the fall. Based on this study, I recommend training for both new and experienced coaches at the beginning of the year to lay a strong foundation for the partnership principles. Coaches need to understand from the start of the school year that the responsibilities of coaching go far beyond providing resources or writing assessments. Literature suggests that coaches do not always have clearly defined responsibilities (Killion & Harris, 2016); therefore, coaches will need purposeful training in how to build partnerships with teachers (Knight, 2007,

2011, 2013, 2016, 2018). Coaches will require support and training to help them apply the partnerships principles to their practice. Emphasizing the relationship will be central; however, an important goal for this training would also be to explore different ways that teachers could engage in coaching and how to make plans for teachers when continuing the cycle. Again, keeping teachers engaged in a productive process will be central to the success of instructional coaching.

Utilizing further training throughout the year will emphasize reflection and problem solving with other coaches. Just as reflection is a powerful tool for teachers, coaches need the same opportunity and space to grow. As demonstrated, growth does not come through isolation. Training should offer coaches multiple avenues to practice and then implement in their own work. Whether participating in check-ins with other colleagues, district specialists, or their administration, coaches must have the same opportunity and space to grow. Growth is complicated, and coaches need support in that process.

In addition, I recommend coaches be required to journal after coaching events to provide a foundation for future growth. These journals could then serve as a foundation when working with a partner in the reflection time. Directions for journaling will lead coaches to think about the growth in a coaching cycle and challenges along the way. Partnership with a fellow coach and further training in analyzing these journals will guide coaches to bring relationships to the forefront of instructional coaching. Although this may be difficult at first, I posit that the growth from reflection is well worth the time and effort. Through this growth, coaches have the potential to become more efficient and purposeful in working with teachers. The process of journaling throughout this study was the most powerful part of the process for me. Relationships are

inevitably complicated, but reflection and partnership with others will help to move instructional coaching forward.

Closing Thoughts

High school English teachers in Texas are facing significant demands from testing and re-testing. This study demonstrates that providing teachers with a partner to engage in purposeful and respectful coaching could lead to significant impacts on both teacher comfort levels with their striving students. Strong relationships are key, but coaches will likely not stumble upon these relationships. Different than a friendship or colleague relationship, a coaching relationship must be built on a commitment to improvement in student learning, choice, and trust. Coaches need training in ways to facilitate the development and maintenance of these relationships in order to continue engagement in the coaching process. Teacher choice and an individualized approach should be highly valued, which also makes continuous training of instructional coaches essential to the process. Continued reflection is a necessity in improving coaching practice. Whereas the study began with a focus on teacher experiences with coaching, I realized that how the coach is willing to grow is perhaps equally important. Coaches will require continued support in order to keep growing.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-CONFERENCE QUESTIONS

Structured Interview Questions: Pre-Conference

- Please tell me a little bit about yourself. What is your background? What led you to the teaching field?

- What is your previous experience with striving students? What is your current experience with striving students in your classroom?

- What celebrations are you currently experiencing in your classroom?

- What has led to those celebrations (instructional strategies, curriculum, relationship building, etc.)?

- What challenges are your currently facing in the classroom?

- What factors do you believe led to those challenges (instructional strategies, curriculum, relationship building, etc.)?

- As you reflect on these celebrations and challenges, let's create a PEERS goal together.

- Based on your PEERS goal, what type of instructional coaching would you like to participate in (co-teaching, modeling, data collection during observation, watching a partner teacher)? Why do you think this will be most helpful in the instructional process?

APPENDIX B: POST-CONFERENCE QUESTIONS

Structured Interview Questions: Post-Conference

- What went well during your lesson? What celebrations stuck out to you?

- What do you believe led to those celebrations?

- What challenges arose during your lesson?

- What do you believe led to those challenges?

- Considering all of your students and their different academic levels, how do you think the lesson impacted the learning of striving students?

- Based on our work together, what would you like our next steps to be to build on the successes you experienced and address the challenges? What type of instructional coaching would best help you in the next step?

- Please describe your experience with instructional coaching during this coaching cycle.

APPENDIX C: ANNOTATED LESSON PLANS

Suggestions for Annotating Lesson Plans

As you reflect on the lesson, consider:

1. Positive and/or negative portions of the lesson
2. What made each portion successful or challenging?
3. What moves could be made for improvement (teacher and/or student moves)?
4. How you felt at the end of the lesson

APPENDIX D: ARTIFACT

I. Title: Making Partnership Matter in Instructional Coaching.

II. Welcome and Introduction

III. Objectives: Attendees will be able to-

   A. understand the background and conceptual framework of this Record of Study.

   B. make connections between instructional coaching literature and South East ISD's instructional coaching program.

   C. explain the data collection process and analysis involved in this study.

   D. comprehend and discuss recommendations as a result of the study.

IV. Where We Are

   A. Data (English I and English II STAAR Data)

   B. Lack of improvement in data since the implementation of instructional coaching

V. Research Questions

VI. Conceptual Framework

VII. SEISD's Instructional Coaching Commitment

   A. Current coaching approach

   B. Jim Knight's partnership principles

VIII. Data Collection Methods: pre-conference semi-structured interview, annotated lesson plans from instructional event, post-conference semi-structured interview, researcher journal

   A. Identify, Learn, Improve

   B. Who was involved?

IX. What does the research tell us? Analysis of Themes and Sub-Themes

A. Developing patterns

B. Discussion of analysis

X. Recommendations: Partnership

A. Coaching partners

1. Continuous engagement with teachers should be an essential goal in instructional coaching.
2. Coaches need to have the opportunity to reflect on their coaching cycles with a colleague and also to be held accountable for continued participation with teachers.
3. We ask teachers to partner with us for the purpose of growth. Instructional coaches should have the same opportunity.

B. Coaching journal

1. Let go of the log! The quality of time- not the quantity of time- is the key to an effective instructional coaching relationship.
2. Journals encourage reflection. They can also serve as the center of the work with coaching partners.

XI. Discussion: What does this mean for SEISD? What are the potential impacts?

XII. Closing Thoughts

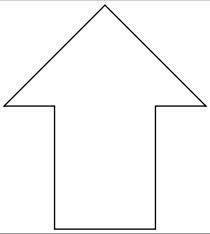
APPENDIX E: COACHING JOURNALS

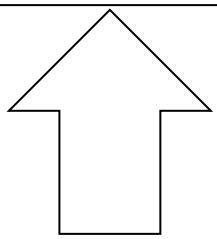
After each instructional coaching event (pre-conference, co-planning, observation, model lesson), complete a journal entry following the questions below:

Write a brief summary of the event

What went well?

What challenges did you face?





What do you believe led to those successes?

What do you believe led to those challenges?

Based on your reflection, make a PEERS goal for your next coaching event with this teacher.

APPENDIX F: COACHING PARTNERS

Coaching Partner Directions

With your partner, discuss your journal entries from this week. Write a summary of your partner's coaching experience below.

Write any similarities or differences in your experiences with teachers.

Write one goal for your coaching cycles next week. How will you know if you have achieved this goal?

How can your partner support you in achieving this goal?